

SOCIAL WORK AT ITS BEST

**A STATEMENT OF SOCIAL WORK ROLES AND
TASKS FOR THE 21ST CENTURY**

"People value a social work approach based on challenging the broader barriers they face. They place a particular value on social work's social approach, the social work relationship, and the positive personal qualities they associate with social workers. These include warmth, respect, being non-judgemental, listening, treating people with equality, being trustworthy, open, honest and reliable, and communicating well. People value the support that social workers offer as well as their ability to help them access and deal with other services and agencies"

"The Changing Roles and Tasks Of Social Work From Service Users' Perspectives" (Shaping Our Lives, 2007)

"Social workers need to understand more from a child's perspective about any situation.....[they need] understanding of a person's feelings and to understand all children are different...With children in care, they need to always know they have someone they can turn to and talk to...You just want people to listen, understand and be there on a regular basis."

Children quoted in "About Social Workers : A Children's Views Report" (Children's Rights Director, CSCI, 2006)

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STATEMENT OF SOCIAL WORK ROLES AND TASKS

1 - SUMMARY STATEMENT

1 – Social work is an established professional discipline with a distinctive part to play in promoting and securing the wellbeing of children, adults, families and communities. It operates within a framework of legislation and government policy, set out in *Putting People First* and the *Children's Plan*, and contributes to the development of social policy, practice and service provision. It collaborates with other social care, health, education and related services to ensure people receive integrated support. It is a profession regulated by law.

2 – Social work is committed to enabling every child and adult to fulfil their potential, achieve and maintain independence and self-direction, make choices, take control of their own lives and support arrangements, and exercise their civil and human rights. It looks at people's lives and circumstances in the round, and works with them to personalise social care responses to fit their own individual situations. Its approaches and working methods aim to promote empowerment and creativity.

3 – In line with the *Children's Plan* and *Putting People First*, social work is practised, whenever possible, in partnership with the children, adults, families and communities using its services. It is concerned with the personal, practical, psychological and social aspects of people's lives. People particularly value the human qualities contained in social work relationships. For children and young people in care, the consistency and reliability of the relationship with their social worker is especially important

4 – Social work embodies a set of core values and principles. It is committed to the rights of the child; respects the equality, worth and human rights of all people, and their individuality, privacy and dignity; and challenges discrimination and prejudice. Its knowledge base, drawn from relevant academic disciplines, is informed by the experience and expertise of people using services, developed through research and tested in practice.

5 – Social work roles are shaped by a number of features: the circumstances of people receiving social work, the functions which require a registered social worker to be involved, the outcomes social work enables people to achieve, the knowledge, values and skills on which it draws, and the approaches and methods it applies in responding to people's needs and aspirations. It is this combination of features that makes social work distinctive.

6 – Social work makes a particular contribution in situations where there are high levels of complexity, uncertainty, stress, conflicts of interest, and risk, particularly to children and vulnerable adults. It applies specialist analytical skills and knowledge to assessing these situations, and making complex judgements on action to take. In some situations, decisions are necessary on whether or not to use statutory powers to intervene.

7 - Much day-to-day social work has a clear preventative role, supporting parents and carers, reducing the risks of abuse and neglect, preventing family breakdown, and helping people maintain or recover their independence. Skilled social work often avoids the need for compulsory action, and enables children or adults to remain safely in their homes. As in *Putting People First*, it supports people to find their own solutions, possibly change their behaviour, navigate the system of public services and personalise their choices.

8 - Employers need to identify the situations where a registered, experienced social worker should always be involved. These include situations where a child or vulnerable adult needs safeguarding from abuse, neglect, or exploitation, and possibly removing from home; when a child or adult could cause significant harm to themselves or other people; where there is serious likelihood of family disintegration or relationship breakdown which threatens to impair health and wellbeing; when parents or carers are unable to look after their children, and an alternative is needed; when a child is in care, whether for a short period or on a continuing basis; and where the child's or vulnerable adult's future home, care or custody arrangements are disputed.

9- Social work roles require a wide range of tasks to be performed. These can include acting as broker to obtain the support people want through creative use of all available resources; enhancing parenting and supporting the physical, intellectual and emotional development of children and young people who need help, in line with the *Children's Plan*; helping disadvantaged people of all ages improve their health and wellbeing; arranging good-quality alternative care for children whose parents cannot care for them, and for adults who can no longer manage in their own homes; and aiding people in poverty to improve their financial position, informing them about their entitlements, and supporting them to access training, work opportunities and benefits.

10 – These tasks are integral to an effective social work response, but do not all have to be carried out by social workers. Some tasks can be appropriately shared with or delegated to other social care staff under social work supervision, including those in new and emerging specialist roles. Some tasks are also part of the roles of other disciplines, and social work is increasingly making its distinctive contribution in inter-disciplinary teams and multi-agency settings. It is good at building bridges with other disciplines and agencies, and helping overcome some of the barriers and gaps between different professions which can create difficulties for people with multiple or complex conditions using several services.

11 – To ensure the conditions for good practice, and fulfil their duty of care, employers must provide social workers with good quality supervision, realistic workloads, access to learning support and continuing development, enabling IT and management systems, and a suitable working environment. Social workers are responsible for updating their knowledge and practice, and contributing to research, student learning and briefing for other professions.

2 - REMIT AND PROCESS

12 - In September 2006, the Ministers for Children and Care Services in England commissioned a statement of social work roles and tasks for the 21st Century. This is part of the government's programmes to modernise social work and social care for children and adults, set out in *Every Child Matters*, *Care Matters*, *Independence, Wellbeing and Choice*, *Our Health, Our Care, Our Say*, mental health and mental capacity legislation, and summed up in *Putting People First* and the *Children's Plan*. The statement has been prepared by the General Social Care Council, working with the Commission for Social Care Inspection, Skills for Care, the Children's Workforce Development Council and the Social Care Institute for Excellence. A Reference Group of stakeholders including user and carer organisations, employers, practitioners, academics and allied professions contributed advice at all stages.

13 - The Statement is designed to serve several purposes, and addressed to a variety of audiences. It aims

- to tell people who use services what to expect of social work, and increase the confidence of the public in what it offers.
- to clarify the distinctive contribution social work makes to implementing government policies, joint working with other disciplines, and the wellbeing of the community,
- to focus and improve social work practice, raise its status and enable scarce professional resources to be better used;
- to underpin social work education, training and regulation, and inform workforce planning and development.

14 - The statement has been the subject of extensive consultation. It draws on commissioned reviews of relevant research literature, users' experience and policy documents, consultative events involving a wide range of interests, and a large number of responses to a consultation document and questionnaire. It reflects the views of people who use services, of social workers and their employers in all sectors, and of many other stakeholders in social care and beyond who have been involved in its preparation.

3 - POLICY CONTEXT

15 - Social work operates within a constantly developing framework of policies and legislation for children's and adults' social care, and for related fields like health and education. Despite generally rising prosperity, people and society face some challenging social problems. Government policy set out in *Putting People First* and the *Children's Plan* stresses the need to get away from standard "one-size-fits-all" provision, and personalise services and responses to the circumstances, strengths and aspirations of particular children, adults and families. The emphasis is on making sure all children are supported to achieve their full potential, and on adults having as much control, independence and choice as possible whatever their age or level of disability. Professionals are expected to work in partnership with people to find the solutions and achieve the outcomes they want, and to collaborate

with other agencies and disciplines to ensure support is delivered in a coordinated way.

16 - Social work makes a key contribution to the wellbeing of individuals, families and communities:

- Ensuring the health and wellbeing of older people, whether in their own homes or in residential care, presents real challenges. These will increase as the proportion of very old people rises, and with it the demand for personalised support. *Social work at its best helps older people maintain their dignity and independence, increase their choice and control over how and where they receive support, protect them from abuse, and avoid unnecessary admissions to hospital.*
- Disabled people of all ages are entitled to be treated as full citizens in control of their own lives, taking the same opportunities and risks as other people. *Social work at its best helps disabled people, including those with learning difficulties, to enjoy their rights as full and active members of their communities, free from discrimination and abuse.*
- People with mental health problems want expert help at times of difficulty, freedom from abuse, stigma and discrimination, and support to recover, get jobs and homes of their own, and take their place in society. *Social work at its best can help them overcome the barriers to living full lives in the community, challenge negative stereotyping and improve public understanding of mental health matters.*
- Children in care deserve a fair deal. Local authorities must ensure their healthy development, and see that they have the security and support to do well at school and become confident, successful adults. *Social work at its best enables the state to be a better parent, and help children thrive and fulfil their potential.*
- Society wants every child to be free from the threat of abuse, neglect and exploitation, to grow up fit and healthy and have opportunities to succeed. *Social work at its best safeguards vulnerable children, ensures they get the care and support they need, and works with families and carers to overcome problems and reduce risks.*
- Unhappy children without supportive families can get involved in crime and violence, in substance abuse and teenage pregnancy. *Social work at its best helps to turn children away from delinquency and self-harm, and enables people to be more effective parents.*
- Some individuals and families behave in ways that are antisocial and pose a threat to the wellbeing of others. *Social work at its best confronts children and adults firmly and constructively with the consequences of their actions, and helps them change their behaviour.*

- Some communities experience long-standing deprivation and multiple disadvantage, and suffer from stigma and social exclusion. *Social work at its best helps communities build on their strengths, develop their own solutions and create networks of support for their members.*
- Social care operates in a context of ethnic, cultural and religious diversity, with commitments to equality and civil rights. Changing patterns of international mobility and migration are creating new challenges, such as responding to the needs of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. *Social work at its best helps to ensure the wellbeing and human rights of migrant, refugee and asylum-seeking children, adults and families, and seeks to improve understanding between migrant and host communities.*

4 - THE SOCIAL WORK CONTEXT

17 - Social work is practised in a variety of settings. These include local authority children's and adults' services, NHS primary and hospital care, joint teams and multi-disciplinary services, specialist agencies like CAFCASS, independent practices, voluntary and not-for-profit bodies including user-led organisations, private sector companies and private practice. Within local authority, NHS and inter-agency services, social work is often structured in specialist teams focused on child protection, children in care, family support, disabled children, leaving care, children's centres, fostering, adoption and permanence, child and adolescent mental health, youth offending, care management, disability, learning difficulty, substance abuse, mental health, and older people.

18 - Social workers are held to account in various ways for the work they do. All social workers must be registered with the General Social Care Council, meet its qualification and continuing development requirements, and abide by its Code of Practice. The title "registered social worker" is protected in law, and action can be taken against anyone claiming to be a social worker whose name is not on the register. Social workers are accountable to the law, to their employers, to people using their services and to the standards set out in the GSCC Code. They have to deal with the tensions caused by this multiple accountability.

19 - Social work takes place within a framework of law and regulation. Wherever possible, social workers aim to work in partnership with the people they are helping, encouraging them to keep control of their lives, express their views and participate in decisions that affect them. Relationships and trust are important. Sometimes however, they need the ability to stand back, make judgements and reach hard decisions in order to protect vulnerable people or to exercise control. In local authority social work, regulations often prescribe procedures for assessment, investigation and joint working with allied disciplines. Social workers may have to use their legal powers to

intervene in complex situations, and may need to override the wishes of individuals and families in order to safeguard a child or adult who is at risk.

20 - People are generally keen to manage their own affairs with a minimum of interference. This is the premise of *Putting People First*. Many prefer to assess their own needs and organise their own support. This is changing the way some social work tasks are defined. Much day-to-day social work has a clear preventative role, supporting parents and carers, reducing the risks of abuse and neglect, preventing family breakdown, and helping people maintain or recover their independence. Skilled social work often avoids the need for compulsory action, and enables children or adults to remain safely in their homes. It assists people in finding their own solutions to complex problems, whether by changing their behaviour or navigating the system of public and other support services. Social work also works with health, education, housing and other agencies, helping people achieve joined-up solutions as well as making best use of public funds. A core task of social work is the development of working partnerships with other professionals and agencies.

21 - To perform at their best, social workers require active support from government, employers and the public. Many social work roles help implement government policy and are essential in enabling local councils, schools, the NHS and the justice services to carry out their roles. Government is responsible for ensuring resources are sufficient to meet needs and maintain standards of good practice. Employers must provide good quality supervision, learning support, IT and management systems, and working conditions. Local authority members and the media need help to understand the risks social workers have to manage and the high levels of responsibility they carry. Social workers themselves should be proud of their profession and willing to speak out about what they do. And most important, a stronger partnership is needed between social workers and people who use the services they provide.

5 - DEFINING SOCIAL WORK ROLES

22 - Social work is practised world-wide. The following is a widely accepted international definition:

“The social work profession promotes social change, problem solving in human relationships and the empowerment and liberation of people to enhance well-being. Utilising theories of human behaviour and social systems, social work intervenes at the points where people interact with their environments. Principles of human rights and social justice are fundamental to social work”

23 - In preparing this Statement, the project team and Reference Group found it necessary to consider and seek answers to several different but related questions implied in the remit:

- What range of roles and tasks does modern social work encompass?

- What is unique or distinctive about social work roles and tasks compared with those of other disciplines?
- What roles and tasks require the levels of knowledge and skill possessed by social workers, as distinct from other social care staff?
- What roles and tasks should be performed only by social workers?

The Statement distinguishes “roles”, based on the broad purposes of social work and the outcomes it enables people to achieve, from “tasks”, the activities required to deliver those purposes and outcomes. The roles tend to be particular to social work, although they are often performed within multi-disciplinary teams and settings. The tasks may be carried out by social workers, or shared with or delegated to other social care staff, and are often similar to tasks other disciplines undertake in performing their roles.

24 - In recent years there has been a trend, reinforced by government policy, towards blurring role differences and loosening boundaries between professional disciplines. Unduly rigid boundaries are thought to cause problems to people trying to find their way round the system, and to make for inefficiency in the use of professional resources. Social work roles tend to be more elastic than those of many other disciplines, for a variety of reasons:

- Social work has to take account of people’s needs, circumstances and relationships as a whole, rather than focusing on a particular condition or delivering a defined service.
- Increasingly, social workers are working in partnership with people to co-produce solutions matched to their strengths and preferences, and jointly securing the best possible outcomes.
- In enabling people to exercise control and choice, social work must respond to demands for more personalised solutions, to be flexible in finding new ways of working, and adapt to people’s changing situations
- Social work as a profession plays a key role in mediating between the individual and the state, and determining when it is necessary for the state to intervene in the lives of individuals and families.
- Social work’s remit for negotiating with other agencies, and coordinating support from various sources, often takes it into the territory of other services and professions.
- In helping people excluded by other services, it can be difficult for social work to draw hard and fast boundaries round its roles.
- Social work is an evolving profession, constantly responding to new policy aspirations, expanding knowledge and rising public expectations

25 - What makes social work roles distinctive is the combination of several features. These features are considered under the following headings:

- the characteristic situations of people who receive social work support or intervention
- the functions for which social work skill and expertise are required;
- the types of outcomes social work enables people to achieve;
- the combination of knowledge, values and skills it possesses;
- the evidence base for social work practice;

- the methods and approaches it applies to assess, record and respond to people's rights and needs.

6 - CHARACTERISTIC SITUATIONS OF PEOPLE REQUIRING SOCIAL WORK SUPPORT OR INTERVENTION

26 - Social work helps children, adults, families and communities in a wide variety of circumstances. It often works with people at times of crisis, or in situations where other services have been unable or unwilling to help. Social work applies expert knowledge and skills to analyse complex individual, family and social situations where there is a need to assess high levels of risk and uncertainty, conflicting interests and difficult choices, to make judgements and to take action appropriately. Sometimes, the social worker's roles and responsibilities are defined in law, regulations, guidance and procedures. Many situations are unpredictable, however, and decisions on appropriate action require skilled professional judgement.

27 - Social workers characteristically find themselves in lead roles where:

- the social or family situation is complex, and a mix of factors needs to be assessed before help can be provided *[e.g. Concerns about a child's attendance, performance or behaviour at school may be linked to family stress, parental depression, physical or sexual abuse, poor diet, language problems or bullying]*
- the child, adult or family has difficulty building trusting relationships but they need skilled help from a worker who is able to win their trust *[e.g. A husband is carer of a partner with early dementia, is ashamed of her condition, resists help, is wary of strangers, and there are signs of adult abuse]*
- a social situation contains clear risks to a child or adult, there is uncertainty about the best form of action to take, and both taking action and not taking action could have serious consequences *[e.g. A single mother is dependent on a violent partner who poses a threat to the children, which may require his exclusion or their removal]*
- assessing risks and responses is made harder by unpredictable factors like family conflict or emotional stress *[e.g. A person with enduring mental illness may be able to self-manage medication and remain stable except when disputes arise in the family, when they are more prone to self-harm]*
- the child, adult or family may put themselves or others at risk of harm and a response has to balance the individual's interests and the well-being of others *[e.g. a couple with learning difficulties are assessed as lacking sufficient skills to be safe and effective parents, and fear support will be intrusive or lead to loss of their children]*
- the child's, adult's or family's living conditions, finances, behaviour or other circumstances are causing problems and likely to result in social exclusion *[e.g. neighbours may seek care for an older person]*

who is depressed and reclusive, self-neglecting and prone to infection-related confusion, but the person may not want care]

- the behaviour of a child, adult or family causes concern or is unacceptable to neighbours or society, but evidence for action is not clear [*e.g. neighbours and the school report anxieties about the general wellbeing of a local child, but solid evidence of neglect or abuse is not forthcoming, and prejudice may be a factor*]
- the child, adult or family is facing serious difficulties, choices, bereavement, loss or other major changes which they need help and support to manage [*e.g. the loss of a caring partner leaves an older person unable to cope practically or emotionally, and uncertain and anxious about choosing among available alternatives*]
- the person's aspirations and needs are such that a creative approach is required to help them find or devise the solutions that are right for them [*e.g. a severely disabled young person and his family want to make the best use of flexible budgets to design an innovative support system giving him maximum independence*]
- a disaster or emergency creates a need for urgent, wide-ranging support for victims [*e.g. immediate and continuing work with people whose lives have been disrupted by floods or terrorist bombings*]

7 - FUNCTIONS REQUIRING SOCIAL WORK SKILL AND EXPERTISE

28 - Some social work roles and tasks are identified in legislation and guidance. These include:

- carrying accountability for decisions (in conjunction with their agency) about whether to use legal powers or initiate emergency protection procedures
- making judgements on whether a child or adult at risk needs to be removed to a place of safety, or whether an alternative approach would prevent the need for compulsory action.
- being the social worker for a child in care, responsible on behalf of the local authority for carrying out the duties of the corporate parent and ensuring the child's health, wellbeing and educational progress.
- working with children and families involved in court proceedings, both civil and criminal.
- making joint assessments of social and nursing needs in conjunction with disabled and older people
- cooperating with other disciplines in implementing the frameworks for inter-agency and multi-disciplinary working in children's and adults' services.

29 - In a few instances, legislation or guidance stipulates that a role should be performed only by a social worker, or names social work as one of the professions approved for particular roles. The Independent Reviewing Officer who monitors the progress and care plans of children in care must be an experienced social worker. Under the guidance on *Working Together to Safeguard Children*, a qualified and experienced social worker should lead the core assessment as part of an enquiry into whether safeguarding action is

required. Social workers may be approved mental health professionals under mental health legislation, or carry out “best interests” assessments when a person may be deprived of their liberty under the Mental Capacity Act.

30 - In other circumstances, it is the responsibility of employers to determine which situations require the deployment of a registered social worker, who may work as part of a team with social care workers and other professionals. *It is recommended that an experienced social worker should always be involved in situations where:*

- *investigation and action may be needed to safeguard a child or vulnerable adult from abuse, neglect, or exploitation.*
- *risks must be assessed and responses planned when a child or vulnerable adult may cause significant harm to themselves or other people.*
- *there may be a need to remove a child from their parents or carers, or an adult from their home to a place of safety*
- *there is serious likelihood of family disintegration or relationship breakdown which threatens to impair health and wellbeing*
- *parents or carers are unable to look after their children*
- *a child is in care, whether for a period or on a continuing basis*
- *a person is in need of support or care but unable to exercise mental capacity or provide informed consent*
- *the child's or vulnerable adult's future home, care or custody arrangements are disputed.*
- *people are being assessed as foster parents or adopters*

8 - OUTCOMES OF SOCIAL WORK

31 - Social work aims to enable people to overcome problems and achieve the outcomes they want, in line with the *Children's Plan* and *Putting People First*. These outcomes typically include:

- *more control for people over their own lives and the decisions which affect them*
- *economic and financial wellbeing and a decent standard of living*
- *ability to exercise human and civil rights and be active citizens*
- *family stability and opportunities for children to thrive and achieve their potential*
- *secure and stable alternatives for children and young people unable to stay with their families*
- *safety and freedom for children and adults of all ages from abuse, harassment and discrimination*
- *presence in the community for people whatever their disability, and access to the same opportunities as everyone else*
- *ability to maintain or recover independence, solve practical problems and enjoy the rights and benefits of independent living*

- *reduction of risks to people's physical, mental and emotional health and wellbeing, including people providing care and support to relatives and friends*
- *choice of living and support arrangements for people to match their requirements and preferences*
- *timely access to high quality support and care that adapts to people's changing needs and circumstances*
- *ability to remain in their own home as long as possible, and not be obliged to enter institutional care unless this is their choice*

9 - KNOWLEDGE, VALUES AND SKILLS

32 - Initial social work education and training should equip people with the distinctive combination of knowledge, values and skills, drawn from a range of academic disciplines and practice learning, they require for beginning practice. These include;

- respect for the equality, worth and human rights of all people, and for their individuality, privacy and dignity
- understanding of, and commitment to, the rights of the child
- commitment to putting into practice equalities and diversity principles, recognising and dismantling barriers, and challenging discrimination against people using services, carers, families and fellow-workers
- skills in assessing, jointly with people and families, their circumstances, strengths, needs and preferred outcomes
- understanding of individual, family and community dynamics
- skills and knowledge to deal with hostile and aggressive responses to social work intervention, without putting their own safety at risk
- knowledge of the frameworks of law, policy and regulation affecting social work practice
- skills, knowledge and judgement required to recognise and evaluate levels of risk to children and adults, assess possible measures to reduce and manage the risks, and take appropriate action
- skills in enabling people to exercise choice, be involved in decisions affecting them, and use resources to secure the outcomes they want
- skills in communication, particularly with and on behalf of children and adults with limited ability to convey their own views and wishes
- skills in negotiating and coordinating services provided by networks of social care staff and family carers
- skills in inter-agency collaboration and multi-disciplinary teamwork, and understanding of the roles and functions of other professions and agencies
- information-sharing, negotiating and advocacy skills to assist people in obtaining resources, services and benefits
- skills in effective record-keeping and use of records to review progress and learn from practice
- commitment to continuing personal and professional development and the acquisition of advanced and specialist skills and knowledge

10 - THE KNOWLEDGE-BASE FOR PRACTICE

33 - Drawing on a range of academic disciplines, formal research, feedback from people using services, and the experience and reflection of social workers and supervisors, a body of evidence is developing about what works well in social work, in what circumstances, for which groups of people. This knowledge is feeding into more sophisticated frameworks for evaluating complex situations, considering options and selecting methods of known effectiveness. Increasingly, this knowledge base is drawing on international experience, both through access to the variety of overseas as well as UK academic and practice journals, and with greater numbers of staff working in the UK who qualified or have worked abroad.

34 - People using services and front-line practitioners are developing research skills and taking a larger part in defining research questions, conducting research and interpreting the results. Their distinctive perspectives are enhancing the lessons to be drawn from research. They are also contributing to learning cultures in organisations, and a growing research awareness among practitioners and managers as well as people using and providing services. Shared knowledge is an important tool for increasing the independence and control of people using services, and their influence over how social work is practiced and services designed.

11 - SOCIAL WORK METHODS AND APPROACHES

35 - Methods of working in social work have evolved over a long period, rooted in common core principles but reflecting changing legal and policy frameworks, social attitudes and expectations, and relationships between professionals and the public. Key features include:

- professional relationships based on warmth, trust and rapport with people using services
- social models of assessing people's situations and working with them to overcome barriers to participation and independence;
- practice that seeks to put power in the hands of people to manage their own situations, with the social worker as facilitator
- work that integrates individual, family and community dimensions in a creative balance
- distinctive approaches to understanding and working with risk, recognising the need to safeguard those who are vulnerable whilst enabling people to take the risks that go with ordinary everyday living
- modern approaches to established casework skills and methodologies, working systematically and in an integrated way to keep a focus on people's practical, social and psychological wellbeing
- applying and extending principles of personalisation, which have always been at the heart of social work at its best, to help people find individual solutions to their situations and achieve satisfactory outcomes
- effective joint working with other disciplines, other social care staff, volunteers, foster parents and advocates

12 - TASKS OF SOCIAL WORK

36 - In order to undertake the roles described, and support people to fulfil their potential and achieve their chosen outcomes, social workers perform a variety of tasks. Not all of them are exclusive to social work, but social workers carry them out as an integral part of enabling people to achieve the outcomes they want. Some tasks are specific to work with adults, or with children and families. Many are common to work with people of all ages in many different settings and sectors. Often, both the children and the adults in a family need help or support, and the social worker has to be competent to understand and work with both children and adults.

37 - Some of the principal tasks undertaken by social workers include:

- a. building relationships with people who need support, winning their trust and finding good ways of communicating with them
- b. working with the person or family who needs support to help them assess their situation, decide what they want to achieve, overcome barriers, and obtain support that feels right for them
- c. aiding people who wish to do so to assess their own needs, identify resources, make decisions, and arrange and manage their own support
- d. providing or arranging advocacy for people who do not have a voice, and helping them to be more in control of their own lives
- e. acting as broker to obtain the support people want, developing creative approaches to the use of all available resources to extend individual choices, avoiding the trap of making people fit the services available, and being sensitive to unspoken needs
- f. helping parents develop the skills and understanding to be more effective in meeting their children's needs for care, development and control
- g. supporting the physical, intellectual and emotional development of children and young people who need help, and helping disadvantaged people of all ages improve their health and wellbeing
- h. arranging good-quality alternative care for children and young people whose parents cannot care for them, and for adults who can no longer manage in their own homes
- i. helping children and adults to overcome the problems of disability, negotiate the transition to adulthood and achieve independent living, access direct payments, individual budgets and other funding, and secure personal assistance, equipment and employment adjustments
- j. helping people in poverty to improve their financial position, informing them about their entitlements, and supporting them to access training, work opportunities and benefits
- k. regularly reviewing with people how well support fits their changing needs, involving them in co-recording progress and concerns, and agreeing adjustments and plans for ending contact
- l. enabling people who are dissatisfied with the services they receive, including social work services, to make use of representations and complaints systems to seek explanations, apologies and redress

- m. helping to ensure that public resources are allocated and any charges applied fairly, and informing commissioners of any evidence that the type, scale or quality of services is not matching needs.
- n. seeking to promote social justice by challenging neglect, discrimination and exclusion, and helping to build safe, strong and caring social networks and communities
- o. encouraging integrated working with social care workers, with other professions and agencies, with networks run by people using services, and with community support groups to improve the way services are coordinated and to better understand one another's roles

38 - Not all the tasks arising in the course of working with a child, adult or family require the full expertise of a social worker. Social work tasks with children and families and with adults may be shared between social workers and assistants, support or care workers with the appropriate skills. New roles are emerging, supported by new forms of training, and it is possible for others to undertake and perhaps specialise in tasks which have traditionally been parts of the social work role. The basis for delegating tasks, and models of co-working between social workers and other staff, require careful consideration. The social worker should retain case responsibility and a coordinating and supervisory role, to maintain integrated support and accountability.

39 - At the same time, a clear message from children in care and other people using services is that they place a high value on continuity and consistency in their relationships with their social workers, and find constant changes of personnel a particular problem. Social workers are learning to work on a more equal basis with children, adults and families using services, supporting people to exercise more control over their lives and greater independence. Social workers and support staff should avoid taking on roles people are able and willing to perform themselves

13 - WORKING WITH OTHER PROFESSIONS

40 - Social work works closely with other professional disciplines, including the various nursing specialisms, teaching, occupational therapy and other health professions, psychology, counselling, medical consultants and general practitioners, early years workers, police, youth justice and offender services. Multi-disciplinary teams have increased in number and variety in children's and adults' services, as a means of giving people access to a range of expertise, improving coordination and making best use of scarce professional skills. Social work is good at building bridges with other disciplines and agencies, and helping overcome some of the barriers and gaps between different professions which can create difficulties for people with multiple or complex conditions using several services. It is sometimes necessary to be flexible about boundaries so as to avoid people being referred unnecessarily from one source of help to another, and having to give the same information to different workers. Social work has a tradition of not sticking rigidly to

professional or agency boundaries where greater flexibility serves people's best interests.

41 - Social work should be clear and confident about the expertise it has developed, the distinctive contribution it makes and the features of its work particularly valued by people who use its services. It also has a responsibility to feed its knowledge, values and approaches into the work of joint teams to inform their culture and widen their frame of reference. Professionals working together in multi-disciplinary settings, in children's centres or community mental health teams, for instance, are likely to become familiar with one another's areas of expertise, and able to apply a common core of knowledge, whilst recognising when a particular professional's skills are required. Social workers who are outposted still need access to good professional supervision, learning and development opportunities, up-to-date knowledge support and links to relevant policy and practice developments.

14 – NEXT STEPS

42 - This generic statement of social work roles and tasks can be used in a variety of ways. It provides a starting point for work by employers, education institutions and practitioners to support and develop improved practice. Organisations of people using services and carers should find it useful to support their participation in service and practice review and development, and in informing the expectations of individuals and families in receipt of social work services. It has messages for work to develop the qualification and post-qualifying frameworks for social work education and training, for reviewing national occupational standards and the social work degree. The statement is also designed to assist and inform policy development and implementation work by the Department of Health, Department for Children, Schools and Families and other government departments to implement *Putting People First* and the *Children's Plan*, and enhance the wellbeing of children, adults, families and communities.

"People using services highlight the importance of the relationship they have with a social worker as key to the positives they associate with social work practice. It is this relationship which is the starting point for building trust and supporting people's self-empowerment. People refer to the strengths of the informality, flexibility and warmth of this relationship."

"My ideal social worker would be a good listener, caring, reliable, punctual, understanding, and would help me have a say in reviews".

This statement was drawn up by General Social Care Council in association with the Commission for Social Care Inspection, the Children's Workforce Development Council and the Social Care Institute for Excellence and Skills for Care.

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