The Future of Social Work in Adult Social Services in England
Social work is an international profession with a set of core values and a diverse knowledge and skills base. The International Federation of Social Workers’ definition states:

“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.

“Social work grew out of humanitarian and democratic ideals, and its values are based on respect for the equality, worth and dignity of all people… the profession strives to alleviate poverty and to liberate vulnerable and oppressed people in order to promote social inclusion. Social work values are embodied in the profession’s national and international code of ethics.”

This statement has been produced jointly by the Association of Directors of Adult Social Services (ADASS), the Department of Health (DH), Skills for Care, the British Association of Social Workers (BASW) and the Social Care Association. To produce it, we have consulted with social workers, the Joint University Council Social Work Education Committee, the General Social Care Council and the Social Care Institute for Excellence.

Social work has a key role in the future of adult social services. The purpose of adult social services and social work is to achieve better outcomes with adults of all ages who need services, support or protection. Social work is focused on supporting independence, promoting choice and control for people facing difficulties due to disability, mental health problems, effects of age and other circumstances.

The world in which social work and social care operates is changing. It needs to reflect people’s aspirations to be active citizens, to be in control of the services and support they need and to be deprived of their liberty only when there is no other option.

Social work’s distinct contribution is to make sure that services are personalised and that human rights are safeguarded through:

- building professional relationships and empowering people as individuals in their families and in communities;
- working through conflict and supporting people to manage their own risks;
- knowing and applying legislation;
• accessing practical support and services; and
• working with other professionals to achieve best outcomes for people.

Social workers bring together knowledge, skills and values and put these into practice according to the experiences, relationships and social circumstances of the people they work with.

Social workers are an important resource for councils and other organisations working with individuals and families in need of support. Social workers contribute to better outcomes when people are “made vulnerable by poverty, bereavement, addiction, isolation, mental distress, disability, neglect, abuse or other circumstances”. They work with families where mental health issues, substance misuse, disability, criminal justice issues and domestic violence affect the safeguarding of adults and children. In a time of recession, the demand for social workers may rise as the number of referrals increases in areas such as mental health and adult safeguarding.

The social work contribution to better outcomes for people

Giving people control of their own resources and determining how their needs are met is transforming social services. Services are being personalised. Many people will want to organise all their support and services themselves, based on good information. Others will want help from peers and user and carer led organisations. However, many will want social work support to manage risks and benefits, and to build their self-esteem and aspirations so that they can take control or make difficult decisions. Key outcomes for people are:
• choice and control;
• dignity and respect;
• economic well-being;
• improved quality of life;
• health and emotional well-being;
• making a positive contribution; and
• freedom from discrimination and harassment.

Social work is a regulated graduate profession with a code of practice and a constantly developing knowledge base, and has a key role in public protection. Social work skills are vital to:
• supporting people with the assessment of their needs, circumstances and options;
• working with families to improve well-being and to safeguard vulnerable family members; and
• early intervention and preventive services, inclusion, and helping to build capacity, social enterprise and social cohesion.

Social work is important when people face life-changing circumstances. These may include the onset of disability or dementia, the transition to adulthood, the end of life, the death of a carer or admission to hospital and loss of capacity and ability. These all affect individuals and their families deeply, and they may need psychosocial and practical support.

Social workers also have an important role in working with people whose rights may be undermined through abuse or neglect, or where the law requires deprivation of their liberty. Social workers can assess and manage risk and balance competing rights in order to protect those in need. Social workers make sure that legal action is taken only where necessary, for the shortest time and with the least restriction.
This distinct approach provides an important contribution to multi-disciplinary teams, to support better outcomes. It also complements the contribution of other professions. Social workers in multi-disciplinary teams contribute a holistic view of the person, rather than just their symptoms or circumstances. Seeing an individual in the context of their family, friends and community, and reflecting their hopes and fears for their own future, is where social work can bring an important contribution to the work of the team.

Shaping Our Lives, the National User Network, said that: "People value a social work approach based on challenging the broader barriers they face; they place particular value on social work's social approach, the social work relationship and the personal qualities they associate with social work. 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 to access and deal with other services and agencies."

Building social work practice for better outcomes in the future

What social workers told us: DH, ADASS and Skills for Care held two events and undertook an on-line survey about the roles and tasks of social work over the summer of 2009 and BASW met hundreds of social workers on its “Listening Tour”. By far the majority of social workers felt that social work had a role to play in all of the dimensions of Putting People First: universal services, prevention and early intervention, building social capital, and choice and control.

There is a role for social work in a transformed world, where new roles can be developed and existing ones strengthened. Social work skills will continue to be important to assessment, care planning and review, but social workers may do more direct social work with a stronger therapeutic element.

Social work and its values could be important in shaping the responses of all the workforce. Listening, empowering individuals, being alert to conflict, safeguarding needs and the capacity of individuals, being sensitive to diversity and putting people in control should be part of the behaviours of all staff and services, from the first contact. Social workers could have a leadership role here, particularly in the advanced practitioner and consultant social worker career structure envisaged by the Social Work Task Force.

The following are areas that social work may develop into:

- **Social work and interpersonal support**
  With the development of information, advice and advocacy services, support planning and brokerage, there may be new roles for social workers alongside services led by people using services and their families. This may include services for people who fund their own social care.

- **Social work and safeguarding rights**
  Social work could have an important role in community development work and promoting social cohesion, for example where disabled, mentally ill or substance misusing people are victims of hate crime.
• **Social work with families**
  Social workers already help to break the cycle of generations of individuals trapped in abusive relationships, crime, substance misuse, poor health, unemployment and other factors. Their role in this work could be strengthened to support the current priorities for local authorities to create safe, healthy and prosperous communities.

We will need to develop a broader set of activities and methodologies that social workers, and the organisations they work in, use to address social issues and challenges. As policy develops, we may need to change this statement to reflect the changing policy context.

To make this a reality, we need to concentrate on the issues highlighted by the Social Work Task Force in its report *Building a Safe, Confident Future*, and help social workers develop even greater skills and knowledge for the future, on qualifying and throughout their careers. We need to develop career structures that keep and reward social workers who stay in practice and continue their professional development. Employers should talk to their social workers and provide opportunities for them to influence policy and practice. We need to raise standards of social work education, regulation, practice and supervision to meet future social challenges. Employers must make sure they have good support in place for social workers.

**We are committed to taking this and the detailed work of the Social Work Task Force forward. DH, ADASS, BASW and Skills for Care will support the development of social work in adult social services. In response to the report of the Social Work Task Force, the Government has committed to publish an implementation plan for reform of adult and children’s social work early in 2010. ADASS will develop advice to help Directors to commission their social work workforce. Together we will promote the distinct contribution of social work in adult services, now and in the future.**

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