Social work and personalisation: It's not just about direct payments

The time is ripe for social work in adult services to re-evaluate the professional role. The Care Act 2014 provides the framework and the mandate for social workers to grasp new roles and responsibilities, including leadership that will support personalisation.

From a social worker perspective the appointment for the first time of a Chief Social Worker and the expectation of a principal social worker in each organisation provides a framework for communication and support from the front line through to Government.

Skills for Care held four conferences across the country between February and June 2014 to support employers and social workers to consider the challenges associated with a move from a care management system to one which embraces personalisation. The final conference also incorporated the Care Act guidance. In total 240 delegates attended the four conferences including managers, workforce development officers, people in need of care and support and social workers.

The conferences were supported and enhanced by the inclusion of people in need of care and support in the planning and delivery, Miro Griffiths chaired the London event and Nina Osborne attended all the events, chairing the event in Birmingham. The structure of this conference report was based on their reflections on the important themes which emerged.

The Chief Social Worker for adult services, Lyn Romeo, provided a clear context and direction for the discussion and Ali Gardner Senior Lecturer Manchester Metropolitan University challenged the audience with a series of questions. Videos of both presentations are available on the Skills for Care website.

This report brings together the themes from the presentations, the workshop debates and the post event feedback. It includes key messages for employers and social workers, resources and examples of innovative practice. Whilst these do not provide a template for activity we hope they will provide some signposting to support the journey in this time of change.
Personalisation

“Social work is on the cusp of radical change and social workers need to drive the delivery of personalisation and are best placed to do this” (Delegate at the Leeds event)

A strong message from the chairs and keynote speakers was the need to bust the myth among some employers and social workers that personalisation is only about direct payments. The danger being that if social workers continue to believe this, and misunderstand or are suspicious of the principles, they will disengage from the process, and may become part of the problem by not releasing their control.

Personalisation involves a change in philosophy, a move away from a consumerist model towards a citizenship model. This shift makes explicit the values of social work and rebalances the status of the social worker from “expert”, encouraging partnership working, co-delivery and co-production with people in need of care and support. This does not negate the need for Social Workers to take control of situations where appropriate.

Social work is uniquely placed to work in situations where the power balance needs to be challenged, in everyday terms, this involves moving away from care management to an empowering, relationship model of practice. This is not a new concept to social work but reclaiming it is an important aspect of professional identity.

Social workers are supported by the Professional Capabilities Framework (PCF) to reclaim value driven relational practice. Social workers report that there is a conflict between the bureaucracy of processes (i.e. the Resource allocation system), which fetters the social worker and expectations. This is implicit in the Care Act for the development of the social worker as an autonomous professional, leader and creative thinker.

The principal social worker in the organisation will play a key role in championing the unique social work role in personalisation, supporting the organisation and social workers with these changes.

The importance of using personalisation and the Care Act to promote the value of social work was a recurring theme.

Personalisation is wider than social work and social care but social work will play a leadership role within organisations in identifying and supporting how other services provided by the organisation, e.g libraries can redesign services. There was considerable agreement amongst speakers and a growing awareness amongst delegates of the importance of the social work role in community capacity building, and developing local resources.

Delegates were encouraged by employer examples where organisations had overcome the problems of over bureaucratic systems, and they felt empowered to go back to their organisations with this information and to challenge the dominance of bureaucratic processes.

Key messages

Employers:

- Use your direct payment leads, where they are available – Do they recognise the role of social workers in personalisation and how they can support them?
- Use the experience of the social work pilots to inform redesign of services in a way that reduces bureaucracy and allows professional creativity.
Social workers:

- Engage with the personalisation agenda and take the lead where possible.
- Work with your principal social worker to clarify the unique role of social work in the personalisation agenda – The Care Act will help to do this.
- Use policy and legislation (i.e. The Care Act) to support your practice.

Resources

- Ali Gardner conference video
- Making it Real: Marking progress towards personalised, community based support

Innovative practice

- **Stockport** - A new RAS system has been developed with considerable input from social workers. They have also developed a local learning panel to review practice and consider assessments/budget allocation.
- **Oldham** – Development of a risk enablement panel.
- **Derby** – Development of asset based approach
- **Department for Education** - Social work practice pilots
Leadership and the development of autonomous professionals

"Some days I feel like Tigger, and others I'm more like Eeyore! Like every social worker"
(Lyn Romeo, Chief Social Worker, Adults)

A clear message emerging from the personalisation agenda and the requirements of the Care Act is the professional leadership role of social work at all levels. The need to empower social workers, support the development of professional confidence to become autonomous professionals and take up the lead professional role is central to ensuring the personalisation agenda. This is reinforced and detailed throughout the PCF in the Professional Leadership domain. The role for social work in the Care Act was clearly described by Lyn Romeo in terms of dealing with complexity, conflict, capacity, and maximising independence and choice. Underpinned by traditional social work skills, was the need for legal literacy, positive risk taking, and organisational leadership.

Support from employers and engagement in continuing professional development (CPD) by social workers is crucial for the development of professional confidence. This begins at the ASYE, and this experience can be used in the design of any ongoing CPD activity. Students and NQSWs coming out of higher education are likely to have a fuller understanding of personalisation. This, together with a fresh perspective on how services could be delivered, is fertile ground for creative thinking and innovation, however the danger is that this is wasted if it is not harnessed.

The Community Care article about Calderdale and their recruitment of NQSWs exemplifies this. 72% of social workers surveyed by Community Care felt that they hadn’t had sufficient learning and development to support them with personalisation. In addition, Ali Gardner expressed the opinion that if only the bare minimum of training was available it could result in an instruction manual culture that ran contrary to the principles of personalisation and the PCF. Delegates listed a number of ways that employers are supporting social work staff. Learning and development staff have a leadership responsibility too and need to be proactive in demonstrating what can be done to help develop the workforce in preparation for the implementation of the Care Act.

Care needs to be taken that CPD is not just seen as training or involving academic accreditation. There is a need to move away from this traditional focus and see learning and development taking place through a range of activity. Central to this is the importance of reflective supervision, with the line manager as supervisor and assessor being pivotal to this.

Adopting an appraisal system, which includes observational practice, develops and assures good practice and keeps the manager in touch with the reality of the role, was seen as critical by a number of delegates. At the same time, getting information to front line staff and using all opportunities to encourage debate on the challenges and pitfalls was seen as an important part of engaging social workers.

It’s important that we use feedback from the frontline to harness innovation and feedback from practice to lead service redesign. People in need of care and support have a leadership role too and can be actively supported to provide constructive feedback to inform organisational development. Establishing the desired outcomes from CPD to support personalisation can be measured in practice using a range of impact measurement models and tools and feedback from people in need of care and support should be central to this. A cautionary note was struck by Ali Gardner as she stated the need to “Beware of anti – intellectualism”. Theory, academic rigor and research also have a major part to play.
Key messages

Employers:

- Be bold - think about how to use students and NQSWs to harness their creativity.
- Develop CPD activity which is linked to organisational business plans and meets the requirements of the Care Act.
- Support the development of leadership skills in social workers by listening and taking note of their contributions.
- Establish the desired outcomes for CPD and measure the impact.
- Integrate all CPD activity within reflective supervision and appraisal ensuring the focus is the PCF.
- Support the delivery of reflective supervision.
- Encourage positive risk taking.
- Work across organisations to share resources and best practice.

Social workers:

- Take control - identify your learning and development needs, the PCF will help to do this.
- Work with other social workers to develop a shared understanding of the professional social work role, including leadership in personalisation. For example use peer supervision and case discussion.
- Take the lead and be proactive.

Resources

- Skills for Care - Developing social workers’ practice: Core principles for employers providing a flexible CPD approach for social workers
- Skills for Care - Measuring the impact of CPD on social work practice
- Skills for Care - The Social work leadership toolkit
- Skills for Care - 360 degree development tool
- Skills for Care - Gathering feedback from people in need of care and support

Innovative practice

- Lancashire and Bradford - All social workers have half a day a month allocated for CPD.
- Kirklees - The introduction of a contract/expectations of supervision and learning and development has been adopted by the whole team.
- University of Wolverhampton - They have produced an ASYE module, which is open to all social workers to support reflective practice and critical thinking.
- Calderdale - Targeted recruitment of NQSWs
- Cumbria - They have a knowledge based unit to encourage research by practitioners (leadership through practice) which is linked to supervision and appraisal processes
Partnership

“Social workers are no longer driving the car for the service user but in the passenger seat sitting alongside” (Ali Gardner, keynote speaker)

Partnership was a recurring theme over the series of conferences with the primary partnership identified as the relationship between the person in need of care and support and the social worker. This requires a significant shift in thinking for the social worker, which was encouraged under a care management system. This shift is supported by the roles identified for social workers in the guidance for the Care Act 2014, where social workers are required to enable people to access advice support and services, which they are entitled to. They also expected to discharge legal duties to complement resources and networks of those in need of care and support. The move away from a care management approach towards outcome focussed assessments is a priority and may require social workers to revisit and refresh their interpersonal skills. This was encapsulated in the Shropshire CPD project - Different conversations, better outcomes

Partnerships working between employing organisations and Universities are seen as an important part of maintaining both the stimulation of fresh and innovatory ideas and economies of scale (e.g. commissioning training).

When identifying learning outcomes both organisational and individual professional outcomes should respond to meaningful feedback from people in need of care and support. Service audits and tools to measure the impact of CPD should help to achieve this.

Supporting community capacity building is central to new ways of working for social work but there were concerns about how this would be interpreted in practice. The Care Act may provide the answer if the role of councils and social workers is to focus more on prevention and enablement to ensure that services and interventions are citizen led and build local resources. Social workers are best placed to understand the needs of individuals and the community resources which can best meet those needs. Partnership working between social workers and commissioners would help to identify and develop services to meet the gaps in the market to achieve a joined up approach and overall plan. People in need of care and support also have a contribution to make in the development of services.

Key messages

Employers:

- Develop mechanisms for social workers and commissioners to work together to identify gaps in community resources, this may initially require the development of a shared language.
- Encourage whole system conversations for social workers and people in need of support with senior managers. Have social workers been involved in shaping personalisation in your organisation?
- Review audit and feedback mechanisms with people in need of care and support to ensure that the best possible information on services are being collected and used.
- Include people in need of care and support in the review and development of services.
- Provide refresher training on interpersonal skills.
- Initiate conversations with other employers and local universities and solicit their support.
Social workers:

- Understand and grasp the opportunity to work alongside people in need of care and support – be creative.
- Be familiar with the local market and community resources that are available.
- Think about how to gather and use meaningful feedback from people in need of care and support to progress your development of professional practice and service design.
- Build networks across your organisation to ensure the flow of information.

Resources

- Skills for Care - [Case studies for using the core principles in practice.](#)

Innovative practice

- Local Government Association - [Adult social care efficiency programme](#)
- Calderdale - Using people in need of care and support to co-produce training
- Barking and Dagenham - Using community catalysts to support the development of micro markets.
- Lambeth - Examples of how commissioners and social workers are promoting cross-organisational working.
Effectiveness of social work interventions

“Tell us what social workers need to keep doing, what they need to stop doing, what they need to do differently?” (Delegate at the Birmingham event)

Feedback from delegates suggested that they came to the conferences looking for answers felt like they were left with more questions about the role of social work in personalisation. Some agencies appear to have a clear vision for social work but others are still operating a care management approach. Where social workers need to be located to be most effective and determining the extent of the social work role were most frequently made comments. As has been stated previously the Care Act may answer some of these questions.

Anecdotally there has been a fear for some time that the numbers of social workers in adult services is declining. This is not borne out of the data gathered through the National Minimum Data Set-Social Care (NMDS-SC), which demonstrates a stability of this workforce, nor is it supported by the number of newly qualified social workers (NQSW’s) with a 20%+ increase in those undertaking ASYE registered across all employers in 2013-14.

So where are social workers best placed to be most effective? At the front door is one of the responses provided by a person in need of care and support. Ensuring that there is social worker oversight at the point of initial assessment appears to be efficient and effective. People in need of care and support deserve to have the attention of social workers at this stage and this avoids the revolving door of multiple referrals and ensures appropriate safeguarding measures are in place. Judgements about whether a social worker should be involved are best made by a social worker. The question was raised about the lack of clarity around the distinction between the professional social work role and the unqualified member of staff. The answer to this may lie in the crucial role social work has to play in managing complexity, conflict and risk and in leadership at every level.

The innovative use of the social worker was exemplified by a number of emerging independent social work practices.

Key messages

Employers:

- Take steps to find out where registered social workers are employed across your organisation and within the independent sector in your locality. They may not be working in designated social work roles, but may be able to offer experience and expertise in relation to the broader requirements of the Care Act.
- When considering the role of the registered social workers in your organisation it is important to locate this within the context of what other, non-social work qualified workers, are doing.
- Ensure that social workers can take on a leadership role within integrated settings.

Social workers:

- Be curious, undertake practice research.
- Take up your leadership role, using the PCF to check the expectations at your stage of professional development.
Resources

- **Skills for Care** - Case studies for using the core principles in practice.

Innovative practice

- **NMDS –SC** - [Social workers in the adult social care sector](#)
- **Skills for Care** - [Effective deployment: Commissioning and planning for social workers](#)
- **The College of Social Work** - [Summit paper](#)
- **The College of Social Work** - [Business case for social work in adult services](#)
- **The College of Social Work** - [Future Directions for Investment: Social work with older people](#)
- **The College of Social Work** - [Social work with adults](#)