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AN ROINN

**Sláinte, Seirbhísí Sóisialta
agus Sábháilteachta Poiblí**

MÁNNYSTRIE O

**Poustie, Resydènter Heisin
an Fowk Siccar**

**A 10 YEAR STRATEGY
FOR
SOCIAL WORK IN NORTHERN IRELAND
2010 – 2020**

A CONSULTATION DOCUMENT

July 2010

CONTENTS

GLOSSARY	i
FOREWORD	ii
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	iii
SECTION 1: SOCIAL WORK - THE PROFESSION	1
SECTION 2: SOCIAL WORK – IN NORTHERN IRELAND	5
SECTION 3: THE SOCIAL WORK ROLE – MAKING A DIFFERENCE TO PEOPLE’S LIVES	13
SECTION 4: SOCIAL WORK - STRATEGIC PRIORITIES AND PROFESSIONAL IMPERATIVES	27
SECTION 5: IMPLEMENTING THE STRATEGY	42

GLOSSARY

HSC Trusts	Health and Social Care Trusts
NISCC	Northern Ireland Social Care Council
RQIA	Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority
DSW	Degree in Social Work
HSC Board	Health and Social Care Board
BASW	British Association for Social Workers
HSC	Health and Social Care
NIGALA	Northern Ireland Guardian Ad Litem Agency
DHSSPS	Department of Health and Social Services and Public Safety
OSS	Office of Social Services
CSSO	Chief Social Services Officer
PBNI	Probation Board for Northern Ireland
PSS	Personal Social Services
YJA	Youth Justice Agency
AYE	Assessed Year in Employment
RPA	Reform of Public Administration
UNOCINI	Understanding the Needs of Children In Northern Ireland
NISAT	Northern Ireland Single Assessment Tool
DOJ	Department of Justice
DE	Department of Education
EWS	Education Welfare Service
EWOs	Education Welfare Officers
PHA	Public Health Authority
LCG	Local Commissioning Groups
CPSSS	Child Protection Support Service for Schools

MINISTERIAL FOREWORD



Social workers do an important and challenging job making a difference in many people's lives everyday. They work with people who need help to deal with a wide range of problems, including personal, family or relationship difficulties; the impact of unemployment, social disadvantage, discrimination, exclusion or crime on people's lives; neglect, abuse or exploitation.

Social workers' primary aim is to help people manage their difficulties and regain control in their life in ways that enhance their social wellbeing and protect their safety. This involves helping people have a good quality of life which includes: having somewhere safe to live and enough money to live on; feeling safe and secure in their relationships; participating in and enjoying family life; making their own choices and decisions; engaging in work or other purposeful activities; keeping well and healthy.

Social work is also the lead profession responsible for safeguarding children and vulnerable adults. This work is complex and difficult and social workers are expected to anticipate, prevent and manage behaviours and situations that put individuals at risk or harm.

When things go wrong, social workers face critical scrutiny and are often singled out by the media for blame. It is unsurprising therefore that the public image and understanding of the role and purpose of social work is poor, based as it is on negative media coverage rather than on a broader understanding of what social workers do, the demands of the job and the positive difference they make in many people's lives.

This strategy reflects my commitment to promoting and supporting social work as a valued and valuable profession. Through the implementation of this strategy it is my ambition to ensure that social work is recognised as a professional service that, alongside health colleagues, police, teachers and many others, is helping to make NI a healthier, fairer, more prosperous and safer society for all.

The strategy sets out my priorities to strengthen supports for frontline workers, to improve social work services and to recognise the contribution social work makes in people's lives and to our society as a whole.

MICHAEL McGIMPSEY
MINISTER FOR HEALTH, SOCIAL SERVICES AND PUBLIC SAFETY

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Social workers are an important part of a caring society. At any one time over 190,000 people in Northern Ireland (NI) are in contact with adult and children's social care services. Expenditure on these services represent approximately 30% of the total health and social care annual spend.

Many of us are likely, at some point in our lives, to consult with a social worker whether on our own behalf or for a family member. Often this will be at a time of personal or family crisis – the onset of mental illness, the birth of a child with a disability, a family break-up, a victim of a crime or a death which leaves someone without the carer they had come to rely on. People depend on social workers to be there at such times, to help them work out what needs to be done, to make the right decisions and to access services and benefits they are entitled to. Social workers therefore do not only support 'social casualties' within society, they support many people in many different circumstances.

Social services are delivered by both social workers and social care workers in statutory, voluntary and private sector agencies. Social workers represent approximately 15% of the whole social services workforce in NI which is estimated to number 35,000. The majority of social workers are employed in Health and Social Care Trusts (HSC Trusts) with the majority of social care workers employed in the voluntary and private sectors.

The difference between social workers and social care staff relates to their respective functions, responsibilities, levels of accountability and related qualifications. Broadly speaking, social workers are in the lead role in cases where there is one or more of the following:

- major complexity;
- significant level of risk;
- need to safeguard children and vulnerable adults and/or protect the public;
- actual or potential interference with people's rights (including right to liberty and right to family life);
- the need and/or accountability for the discharge of statutory functions;
- need for knowledge of relevant legislation and its application;
- significant trauma or change in people's lives; and
- a need for expert interagency and/or multidisciplinary co-operation.

This strategy is aimed at social workers in NI and their employers. It is also relevant to service commissioners, social work regulators and education providers. It provides an overview of the profession and how it is organised in NI as well as describing the contribution social work makes to delivering government policy and improving the safety and social wellbeing of individuals, families and communities.

Social wellbeing means enjoying a good quality of life through:

- ***keeping well and healthy;***
- ***having somewhere to live and enough money to live on;***
- ***feeling safe and secure in relationships and living arrangements;***
- ***being able to participate in and enjoy family life;***
- ***being respected and able to make your own choices and decisions;***
- ***having friends and social networks;***
- ***engaging in work or other purposeful activity; and***
- ***realising your full potential.***

The strategy aims to strengthen and support the social work profession to deliver a high quality, effective and safe service in a challenging and changing environment. It seeks to improve understanding of the profession, what it does and what it can realistically be expected to do. The messages are relevant to social work wherever it is practised in NI.

In developing this strategy we have drawn on information from a number of different sources. The consultation on the role of social work carried out by the Northern Ireland Social Care Council (NISCC) has been particularly useful as has similar work undertaken in England and Scotland. We have also taken account of the findings of the Social Work Taskforce in England as well as from the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority (RQIA) inspections and Case Management Reviews.

Some of the most useful information is that which has been provided by people who use social work services. We have tried to reflect what service users and carers have told us about what they value and their expectations of the profession.

Drawing on all of this information we have identified seven areas for action intended to provide strategic direction to support and strengthen the profession. These are as follows:

1. **Supporting social workers to feel valued and confident to do the job expected of them.**
2. **Developing strong professional leadership to support and empower social workers to deliver an effective social work service.**
3. **More effective systems to identify the right type and numbers of social workers needed to meet service demand.**
4. **Designing and delivering social work services around the needs of people who use them, making the best use of resources.**
5. **Developing a culture of continuous improvement, building the knowledge base for practice and evidencing the difference social work interventions make in people's lives.**
6. **Ensuring professional governance arrangements support social workers to practise to consistently high standards and manage risks effectively.**
7. **Promote a greater understanding by the public of the contribution of social work in improving people's social wellbeing.**

SECTION 1: SOCIAL WORK – THE PROFESSION

1.1 Introduction

Modern day social work is a 'living legacy' of the social reformers of the 19th century who sought to address problems such as poverty, lack of education, unemployment, poor housing, unfairness and inequalities that led to social exclusion, deprivation, ill-health and poorer life chances. The Poor Law, the Industrial Revolution and the accompanying 19th century charitable and philanthropic responses are regarded as having been particularly significant in shaping the profession. Historically, this is the point from which social work began to be developed as a discrete and organised activity responding to the needs of the poor and vulnerable. Up until the mid 20th century, it was practised predominantly in the voluntary sector.

From 1948 onwards, with the creation of the Welfare State, social work was increasingly defined through public policy and associated legislation and provided as a public service.

Today, social work is a regulated profession with a distinctive knowledge base, a wide range of statutory powers and duties and a professional Code of Practice.

1.2 A regulated profession

Since 2005, only those registered with the relevant Social Care Council in NI, Scotland, Wales or England are allowed to use the title 'social worker'. Registration guarantees that social workers are suitably trained and qualified and requires them to meet agreed professional and ethical standards in their conduct and practice. Being registered recognises social workers' commitment to providing high quality services and their accountability for the work they do. It also provides assurance to people using services that social workers are competent to provide a safe and effective service.

The training of social workers is also regulated. The Degree in Social Work (DSW) is the generic professional qualification that prepares social workers to work with children and vulnerable adults in a broad range of settings and sectors. Employers and education providers collaborate to deliver both the academic and practice learning components of the course and this prepares social work students to practise in the workplace following graduation.

Because of the significant levels of responsibility and accountability invested in social work through statutory powers and duties, professional training equips social workers with the knowledge and skills to discharge these duties safely and effectively. This includes the development of specific expertise in assessing and managing risks and complex problems as well as a wide range of practice skills and methods of intervention.

A social worker's development does not stop with qualifying training. Post qualifying education programmes ensure social workers are able to further develop their skills, knowledge and expertise in specific practice areas. It is a condition of their registration that social workers keep their knowledge and skills up-to-date throughout their careers.

1.3 **A distinctive knowledge base**

Social work is a highly skilled activity that calls for an extensive knowledge base and considerable intellectual abilities. Social work recognises the complexity of interactions between human beings and their environment, and the capacity of people both to be affected by and to alter the multiple influences upon them. The social work profession draws on a broad eclectic and evolving knowledge base to analyse complex situations and to facilitate individual and social change.

The knowledge base for social work includes psychology, sociology, criminology, human development and behaviour, communication, education, economics, ethics, human rights, social policy and legislation. It is further informed by the views of service users and citizens, practitioners' experience, formal research and organisational audit and inspection.

1.4 **Statutory powers and duties**

The State has responsibilities in legislation and in international conventions for making provision for people who are in need of care or protection. Social work is the lead profession which assists the State in fulfilling a range of social care responsibilities aimed at achieving the best possible outcomes in the lives of vulnerable children, families and adults. Public welfare bodies, such as the Health and Social Care Board (HSCB) and HSC Trusts in NI and (elsewhere in the UK) local authorities, have powers and duties in legislation to assist, support and in some cases intervene in the lives of people to support and protect those who are vulnerable and in need of care. Social workers in other settings where there are statutory obligations, such as probation, education services and adoption agencies as well as those who are guardians ad litem also discharge functions in accordance with legislation governing their respective roles.

The duties exercised by social workers include ensuring the welfare of children in need and promoting their upbringing with their families. Social workers also work to support families, help disabled people to live independent lives and protect and enhance the quality of life of other vulnerable people, including those who are elderly or have mental health needs. Whilst the tasks undertaken by social workers may vary considerably – for example the role of the probation officer will involve quite different tasks to that of an adoption social worker – they all carry out assessments and make decisions and recommendations about the needs of people and the care, protection and other services which should be provided. These duties are reflected in the day-to-day practice of the majority of social workers.

Social workers in statutory settings also have significant powers under child care, mental health, justice and other legislation to take actions in serious situations to protect children or adults from harming or being harmed. These include, for example, the power to remove a child from his or her family and to seek the protection of the court for the child. Under certain conditions and in joint working with doctors, social workers may commit a person with mental ill-health to hospital for a period of assessment without his or her consent. Such extreme measures are only required in a very small proportion of situations. They are however extremely important in helping to ensure the safety and social wellbeing of the individuals concerned and, in some cases, the safety of others. Social

workers must first and foremost always be conscious of the risks and potential for serious harm in any situation and act accordingly

The decisions of social workers, and particularly those involving interventions in family life or the placing of restrictions on the liberty of individuals, must also be taken with due regard to human rights legislation and conventions such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Social workers will also recognise that social work intervention itself carries risks of harm, and take account of the balance of risks, when making professional judgements.

There are invariably complex situations where social workers are expected by the public to play a part in protecting children, vulnerable adults or the public from harm while at the same time respecting and upholding people's rights, such as the right to a private family life or the right of the public to be protected. This involves decisions about thresholds of need, about freedom and fairness, proportionate responses, assessment and management of risk and the utilisation and targeting of resources. Effective social work can also be demonstrated in sound, mature decisions not to exercise statutory powers, sometimes resisting pressure from other agencies or individuals to do so, and in finding alternative ways to deal with difficult situations.

In justice settings the social worker's responsibility is to balance the rights of victims and communities to protection with the needs of offenders to be rehabilitated back into society.

Where children are concerned the overriding principle that must guide the actions of social workers and ultimately the family courts is the paramountcy of the welfare of the child.

In children's services, the social worker must balance the rights of parents to privacy and the rights of a child to live with his or her own family with the need to keep the child safe from harm. Where these rights cannot be reconciled, the paramountcy of the welfare of the child must always take precedence.

Social workers recognise that it is best for children to be brought up in their own families where this is safe and appropriate. They help to support parents in the difficult task of raising their children in an increasingly complex society with more challenges than ever before. In a very small number of cases the State has to intervene in the best interests of a child and through recourse to the family courts, assume parental responsibility for the child. In other circumstances children may be looked after by the State with the voluntary agreement of their parents. Reasons for the need to take such action can range from physical or mental ill-health in the child's family, drug or alcohol abuse, to relationship difficulties, domestic violence or inadequate or compromised parenting capacity or combinations of these factors.

In these situations the state becomes what is known as the "Corporate Parent" and is responsible for ensuring that all aspects of a child's life, including living arrangements, health, education and general welfare needs, are met.

Children who can no longer live with their own family may be cared for by relatives, foster carers or in a children's home. Social workers are responsible for arranging, overseeing and in the case of the children's home, providing this care. This responsibility can extend until a young person is 21, or longer if they are in fulltime education.

In some situations where it is unlikely that the child's family will ever be able to provide a stable and loving home, social workers may decide, with the approval of the family courts, to place the child for adoption. Whilst adoption means that the child becomes a full member of a new family and all legal ties between the child and his/her birth family are broken, adoption arrangements can involve birth parents remaining in direct or indirect contact with the child where this is in the child's best interests.

1.5 Professional Code of Practice

Because of the responsibilities social workers carry and the potential impact they can have on people's lives it is essential their practice is founded on, informed by, and capable of being judged against, a professional Code of Practice. Currently, all registered social workers have to comply with the Social Care Council Code of Practice¹.

In addition, some social workers are members of the British Association of Social Work (BASW) which is the professional association for social work in the UK. BASW has a professional Code of Ethics some of which is reflected in the Social Care Code of Practice.

1.6 Definition of social work

Social work is an international profession practised in countries all across the world. Irrespective of where it is practised, social work shares the common goal of helping to promote and improve people's social well-being. This is reflected in the international definition of social work:

'The social work profession promotes social change, problem solving in human relationships and the empowerment and liberation of people to enhance social wellbeing. 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.'²

How this translates into practice depends on the country in which social work operates, the legislative base of its practice, its professional regulatory arrangements and the profession's relationship with the people and communities it seeks to serve.

¹ NISCC Code of Practice for Social Care Workers, September 2002

² International Federation of Social Workers and International Association of Schools of Social Work (2001)

SECTION 2: SOCIAL WORK IN NORTHERN IRELAND

2.1 An overview of social work in Northern Ireland

NI, as part of the UK, has largely adopted the social legislation and statutory services that comprise the Welfare State. Throughout the 20th century, the government, particularly from the 1970s onwards, extended the legal powers and duties which were vested in social work. The extension of these powers and duties was accompanied by a parallel growth in social work as a profession.

Social work in NI is unique within the UK in that it is organised and delivered within an integrated health and social services system. It is also unique in that it has also been influenced by decades of civil unrest (the 'Troubles').

Throughout the 'Troubles' social work played a significant role in working with individuals, families and communities who were directly or indirectly affected. Today, many people in NI remain affected by bereavement, trauma, violence and the challenge of adjusting to life in a post-conflict society. Social work continues to work with many of these people.

Since the establishment of the NI Assembly and devolved administration in 1998, and more recently the devolution of criminal justice in 2010, decisions by local politicians are setting the policy direction and organisational context for social work in NI.

Today, there are 5,014 registered social workers in NI.³ The statutory Health and Social Care (HSC) sector is the largest employer, employing almost 3,500⁴ social workers, with the remainder employed in other statutory agencies including probation and youth justice, education welfare, the Northern Ireland Guardian Ad Litem Agency (NIGALA) and in the voluntary and community sectors. A small number work as independent practitioners in the private sector or are registered with Recruitment Agencies.

Social workers are based within the community, working with people in their own homes and local communities as well as in residential care homes, day care services, family centres, hospitals, healthcare settings or specialist settings such as Adoption Agencies or Trauma Centres. Those employed in the education and criminal justice sectors can be based in courts, prisons or schools as well as working within the community.

In NI, social work plays an important role in informing and contributing to the delivery of the government's policies and priorities for the welfare and safety of children, families, vulnerable adults⁵, carers, victims and for communities. It also contributes to the delivery of policy on criminal and youth justice and education.

³ NISCC - 2009

⁴ DHSSPS Review of workforce planning for social services - 2006

⁵ Vulnerable adult 'a person aged 18 years or over who is, or may be, in need of community care services or is resident in a continuing care facility by reason of mental or other disability, age or illness or who is, or may be, unable to take care of him or herself or unable to protect him or herself against significant harm', Safeguarding Vulnerable Adults, 2006, DHSSPS

Social workers work with many people in NI every day. People who may be experiencing neglect, abuse, exploitation, addiction, family breakdown or bereavement. People who may be socially isolated, homeless, in poor physical or mental health or have a physical, sensory or learning disability. They all need the input and expertise of social workers in what are often very difficult circumstances.

Social workers working in criminal justice also have a complex role in providing support to victims of crime and working with offenders to challenge them to move away from offending behaviour and make NI a safer place.

Social work will normally be in a lead role in cases where there is one, or more, of the following:

- major complexity;
- significant level of risk;
- need to safeguard children and vulnerable adults and/or protect the public;
- actual or potential interference with people's rights (including right to liberty and right to family life);
- the need and accountability for the discharge of statutory functions;
- need for knowledge of relevant legislation and its application;
- significant trauma or change in people's lives; and
- a need for expert interagency and/or multidisciplinary co-operation.

2.2 **The social work 'delivery system'**

Effective and safe social work practice depends on individual social workers and the infrastructure that supports them. The infrastructure comprises government, service commissioners, social work employers, regulators and education and training providers.

Together these organisations form the 'delivery system' for social work. Each plays a distinct but complementary role in shaping and supporting the profession including: setting the strategic direction; planning and commissioning health and social care services; service provision; setting, promoting and assuring professional and service standards; and developing the workforce.

2.3 **Setting the Direction**

Policy responsibility for social work and social care sits within the Department of Health and Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS). DHSSPS sets the overall strategy for health and social care. Its mission is *'to improve the health and social wellbeing of the people of Northern Ireland'*.

The DHSSPS is responsible for bringing forward legislation, determining and periodically reviewing policy, setting standards, priorities and targets for specific client groups and for health and social care services linked to the policies of the NI Assembly.

The DHSSPS employs professional officers, including doctors, nurses and social workers to ensure policy is informed by professional advice. The Office of Social Services (OSS) is the professional social work group in the DHSSPS, led by a Chief Social Services Officer (CSSO).

The CSSO supports and advises the Minister and policy directorates within DHSSPS and in other government departments of the NI Assembly on policy and practice in social work and social care provision. The CSSO has direct responsibility for the Child Care Policy Directorate, the Family Policy Unit as well as being policy lead for the regulation of the social care workforce and professional social work training arrangements.

The CSSO is accountable to the DHSSPS Minister for the quality and safety of the arrangements for the discharge of all relevant social care functions by the HSC Trusts and the HSC Board and must be able to assure the Minister accordingly.

The CSSO is the professional lead for social work within government in NI. The OSS develops standards and policies to promote good social work practice and to support the development of the profession. Areas of responsibility include:

- social services training strategies;
- professional training arrangements;
- social work practitioner career structures;
- qualification requirements;
- guidance on social care governance arrangements;
- the regulation of social work training;
- regulation of the social care workforce; and
- circulars on arrangements for the discharge of statutory functions and specific policy/practice issues.

Key Milestones in the Development of Social Work in NI

- 1968** - Social Welfare Officers in NI required to hold a social work qualification;
- 1972** - The Health & Personal Social Services (NI) Order 1972 established Integrated health and social services and senior social services officers were recognised as part of corporate management at area and local levels;
- 1976** - Field work social workers required to hold a social work qualification;
- 1982** - Establishment of the Probation Board for NI (PBNI);
- 1986** - Introduction of role of Approved Social Worker in mental health;
Recommendation for residential childcare staff to be social work qualified (Hughes Inquiry).
- 1991** - First Personal Social Services (PSS) Development and Training Strategy
- 1993** - Team leaders in residential childcare required to hold a social work qualification;
- 1994** - Executive Directors of Social Work in Trusts and Boards required to hold a social work qualification and to be included on Trust Management Boards;
Introduction of senior practitioner grade;
Introduction of UK Post Qualifying Training Framework for Social Workers.
- 2000** - Education Welfare; all new entrants must possess a social work qualification.
- 2001** - Establishment of the NISCC;
Reform of Social Work Training Policy.
- 2003** - Establishment of the Youth Justice Agency (YJA);
- 2004** - Social work becomes a graduate level profession with the introduction of the Honours Degree in Social Work in NI;
- 2005** - Legislation is commenced to protect the title of social worker – only people who are qualified social workers and are registered with NISCC can practise as a social worker in NI;
- 2006** - PSS Development and Training Strategy 2006 - 2016 launched;
Assessed Year in Employment (AYE) Policy commenced;
Introduction of NI Post Qualifying Education and Training Framework.
- 2007** - Introduction of Principal Social Work Practitioner grade in Children's Services;
HSC Trusts created as part of the Reform of Public Administration. Executives Director of Social Work continue to be included on Management Boards of HSC Trusts.
- 2008** - Introduction of Understanding the Needs of Children in NI (UNOCINI) - a single assessment tool;
- 2009** - Statutory Requirement for the Director of Social Care and Children to be a member of the board of the HSC Board;
Introduction of the NI Single Assessment Tool for Older People -(NISAT);
- 2010** - Regional Practice Learning Strategy 2010 - 2015.

The CSSO provides professional guidance and advice to the Minister of Justice (formerly the Secretary of State for NI) for those social work services delivered on behalf of the Department of Justice (DOJ, formerly the Northern Ireland Office). The DOJ has responsibility for Northern Ireland's constitutional and security issues, in particular, law and order, political affairs, policing and criminal justice. Social workers are employed in the PBNI as Probation Officers and in the YJA.

The Department of Education (DE) is responsible for all aspects of education at pre-school, primary and post-primary levels and related services including special education, the youth service, community relations within and between schools and teacher education. Its primary statutory duty is to promote the education of the people of NI and to promote regular attendance of children at school. It is also responsible for promoting personal well-being and social development, so that children gain the knowledge, skills and experience to reach their full potential. Social workers are employed in the Education Welfare Service (EWS) as Education Welfare Officers (EWOs). The CSSO provides professional guidance and advice to DE for social work services provided by its agencies.

There is strong co-operation between the CSSO and officials in the DOJ and DE to ensure professional standards, training and regulatory arrangements meet the needs of social workers wherever they are employed. This joined-up approach promotes a strong, unified professional identity for social work within NI and is the basis of effective interagency co-operation to meet people's needs.

2.4 Assessing need, planning and commissioning services

The HSC Board acts as an agent of the DHSSPS and, in partnership with the Public Health Agency (PHA), is responsible for the planning, commissioning and performance management of health and social care services across NI. The PHA is responsible for securing continuous improvement in health and social well-being; tackling inequalities, health protection and helping realise the shared goal of a better and healthier future for people in NI.

The appointment of a professionally qualified social worker as the Director of Social Care and Children's Services within the HSC Board is mandatory. The Director is also responsible for providing professional advice to the PHA on all aspects of social work and social care provision. This is in recognition of the importance of professional expertise at a senior level to participate in and share corporate responsibility for the work of the HSC Board and the PHA; to ensure the effective assessment of need for and development of social care and social work services; to have in place appropriate and sound mechanisms for the oversight of the discharge of the statutory duties and responsibilities placed on the HSC Board.

The needs of local communities in commissioning and planning health and social care services are represented through local commissioning groups (LCGs). Social workers are represented on these groups.

2.5 Service provision

(a) **Statutory HSC sector**

HSC Trusts are the main providers of health and social care, including social work. There are 5 fully integrated HSC Trusts in NI. The NI Ambulance Service, also an HSC Trust, operates a region wide ambulance service.

NI is the only part of the UK which, because of the integrated nature of health and social services, has HSC Trusts that deliver primary, secondary and community healthcare alongside social services. These structures facilitate and support integrated working between social care and health care colleagues.

Of the 3,500 social workers employed by HSC Trusts, approximately 47% work in Children's Services, 32% in Adult Services and the remainder in specialist or management posts.⁶ Many social workers, particularly those in adult services, work in multi-disciplinary teams.

Each HSC Trust is required to have an Executive Director of Social Work who is a registered social worker. Executive Directors of Social Work have a number of specific areas of professional responsibility including: professional governance, standards and practice across all services for children, families and adults; development of the social work workforce; management and/or development of social work and social care services generally; and oversight of statutory functions discharged by the HSC Trust. In addition they play a full role in the general management of the HSC Trust, including sharing in corporate responsibility for policy-making, decision-taking and the development of the HSC Trust's aims and objectives.

HSC Trusts are accountable to the HSC Board for their performance, including accountability for the discharge of delegated statutory functions. Schemes of Delegation of Statutory Functions provide a specific mechanism for monitoring and reporting on the discharge of statutory functions. These are supported by unbroken lines of professional accountability from frontline practice in HSC Trusts through the HSC Board to the CSSO and ultimately to the Minister, DHSSPS.

(b) **Non-statutory sector**

The voluntary and community sector also provide social work services, many of which are delivered in response to commissioning priorities. This sector is positioned well to deliver flexible and responsive services in the areas of prevention, early intervention and the provision of support and after-care at local levels. Social workers in the voluntary and community sector are well placed to make a significant contribution in targeting health and social inequalities, tackling social exclusion and promoting community participation in improving health and social wellbeing. A small number of

⁶ DHSSPS Review of Workforce Planning for Social Services (draft report, 2010). For the purposes of this paper Adult Services includes people 18 and over with a mental or physical illness or disability, people with learning disabilities or sensory impairment and older people (aged 65 and over).

voluntary organisations discharge specific statutory functions in respect of children.

The voluntary and private sectors also provide social care services and make a major contribution to the provision of adult residential and day care, nursing home care, domiciliary care and early years provision. The majority of social care workers (78% of the total estimated social care workforce of 29,000) are employed in the non-statutory sector.

(c) ***Criminal Justice sector***

The PBNI helps to prevent re-offending by assessing offenders, challenging their offending behaviour, changing their attitudes and behaviour and thereby protecting the public. The PBNI does this through the assessment and management of risk and through the discharge of statutory duties and powers under criminal justice legislation including the preparation of professional assessments to assist in decisions regarding sentencing and the supervision of Court Orders/Licences in the community. The DSW is the required professional qualification for Probation Officers in NI.

The YJA of NI aims to prevent offending by children and young people. In doing so, it delivers a range of services, often in partnership with others, to help children and young people address their offending behaviour, divert them from crime, assist their integration into the community, and to meet the needs of victims of crime. The DSW is a recognised professional qualification for Youth Justice Workers in NI.

(d) ***Education sector***

The EWS is a specialist education support service, which seeks to help young people of compulsory school age and their families get the best out of the education system. EWOs support Education and Library Boards to discharge their statutory duties to enable parents to meet their legal responsibilities for their children to access education through regular attendance at school or otherwise. A professional qualification has been the required qualification for new entrants to the EWS since 2000.

The Child Protection Support Service for Schools (CPSSS) comprises a team of full-time dedicated officers for child protection who provide advice, support and training to schools' designated teachers and other professionals within the education sector to promote and safeguard the welfare of children and young people.

2.6 **A service the public can trust**

The NISCC was established to increase public protection through the regulation of social workers. The NISCC is also the regulatory body for social work training at qualifying and post-qualifying levels and promotes high standards in the training, conduct and practice of social workers

The RQIA is the independent regulatory body responsible for monitoring and inspecting the quality of health and social care services in NI, and encouraging

improvements in the quality of those services. Its role is to ensure that HSC services in NI are accessible, well managed and meet agreed standards.

Services in the criminal justice and education sectors are also subject to inspection by the Criminal Justice Inspection NI and the Education and Training Inspectorate respectively. These inspectorates monitor the quality of provision and encourage improvements in performance.

Where appropriate, joint inspections are carried out in recognition of the important interfaces between health, social services, education and criminal justice in improving and protecting people's social wellbeing and safety.

2.7 Developing and improving practice

A primary responsibility of management is the development of the workforce. The PSS Development and Training Strategy 2006 – 2016 provides the basis for supporting and building a skilled, professional, motivated and confident social services workforce that is fit for purpose and fit for the future. It is designed to ensure the development and training needs of all social services employees are met from point of entry into the workforce and throughout their careers.

Newly qualified social workers are required to undertake an 'assessed year in employment' (AYE) when they first enter employment as a condition of registration with the NISCC. The AYE policy was introduced to ensure new social work graduates have the opportunity to consolidate and extend their learning and competence in their first year in practice with appropriate support and professional supervision from their employer.

All social workers are expected to engage in continuous professional development as well as contributing to the learning and development of others as a condition of registration with the NISCC.

Management is supported in developing social workers' competence in the workplace by social services training teams. Social work managers, practitioners and trainers also make a significant contribution to the professional training of social work students and qualified social workers through teaching, supervision and assessment of practice.

Professional social work training at graduate and post graduate levels is delivered in NI by Queen's University and the University of Ulster in partnership with social work employers. Both universities are ranked highly within the UK as approved social work training providers and have received positive reports from both External Examiners and the NISCC.

SECTION 3: THE SOCIAL WORK ROLE - MAKING A DIFFERENCE IN PEOPLE'S LIVES

3.1 An introduction to the role of social work

The aim of social work in NI is to improve, enhance and, where appropriate, to protect the social wellbeing of a wide range of people who may, to varying degrees, be vulnerable or experience social exclusion.

Improving social wellbeing means enjoying a good quality of life through:

- ***keeping well and healthy;***
- ***having somewhere to live and enough money to live on;***
- ***feeling safe and secure in relationships and living arrangements;***
- ***being able to participate in and enjoy family life;***
- ***being able to make your own choices and decisions;***
- ***having friends and social networks;***
- ***engaging in work or other purposeful activity; and***
- ***realising your full potential.***

Social work provides a professional service to meet the assessed needs of individuals, families, carers and communities for support, care or protection. People's need for social work intervention varies greatly. Some people will only need short-term intervention for a specific problem or temporary debility; others may need longer-term involvement because of the nature of their needs or particular risks. A small, but significant, number of people will need social work intervention because they are at risk of neglect, harm or exploitation or because their behaviour represents a risk to themselves or others. Family members and carers also seek social work help to support their caring role.

Social work is carried out on behalf of society and reflects the values and compassion of society for people in need. Through its interventions, social work helps make NI a healthier, fairer, more prosperous and safer society.

The contribution social work makes to people's lives depends on individual circumstances, the purpose of involvement, the level of need or risk and the outcomes to be achieved. This requires social workers to have a wide repertoire of professional skills and ways of working. This enables social workers to respond sensitively and effectively to people's needs intervening no more than is necessary to support people's health, social wellbeing and safety and, on occasion, that of others. This means social workers need to be able to adopt different roles and approaches in their work.

In broad terms, social work roles can be categorised under five headings. These are:

- **Prevention and early intervention** – working to counteract social or economic disadvantage and improve people’s social wellbeing, life choices and opportunities;
- **Empowerment** – supporting and enabling people to make choices and live their lives confidently, responsibly and with maximum independence;
- **Care and support** - helping people to live safely and well with appropriate intervention and levels of support and to promote social inclusion for people who are socially isolated or marginalised;
- **Protection** – working with others to identify and, where possible, reduce the risk of harm to children and vulnerable adults; and
- **Control** – taking action to manage behaviours that put people at risk of harm.

Most social work practice, irrespective of service user group, setting or job focus, requires social workers to adopt all, or elements of all these five roles in their work. Professional training equips social workers to take a systemic perspective in working with people and to link social problems such as poverty, unemployment, poor housing and discrimination with individual issues such as illness, relationship problems, addiction or compromised mental capacity.

Figure 1 illustrates how each of the five social work roles contributes to improving people’s health, social wellbeing and safety and the paragraphs following explore each role/approach and related outcomes.



Figure 1

3.2 Prevention and early intervention

Prevention and early intervention: contributing to a healthier society by:

- improving the quality of life, life choices and opportunities of people affected by social or economic disadvantage; and
- promoting the availability and accessibility of early support services and responses to individuals, families, carers and communities.

The health and social wellbeing of people is 'determined by social, economic, environmental and political conditions' and not simply the absence of disease or illness.⁷ Health and social wellbeing involve issues of social justice and equality as well as good healthcare. Social work makes an important contribution to the public health agenda by, among other things, tackling the underlying causes of ill-health and reducing inequalities linked to or exacerbated by social circumstances such as poverty, social exclusion, dependency and isolation. It also helps improve people's quality of life, life choices and opportunities.

By undertaking comprehensive assessments and in particular by identifying risk factors social workers can often intervene in people's lives before difficulties become critical. They can do this in a number of ways. They may be able to help an individual gain insight into their circumstances; connect people to appropriate services; advocate on their behalf; or by strengthening their relationships with wider family and community supports.

The growing body of evidence that preventive and early intervention strategies are effective in achieving better outcomes for people is increasingly reflected in government policies.⁸ What happens to children, particularly when they are very young, strongly influences what kind of an adult they will become. This requires earlier 'upstream' intervention and supporting families to ensure every child has a good start in life and for problems to be identified and dealt with before they escalate and become entrenched.⁹

Social work is the lead profession responsible for co-ordinating interagency plans and services for children in need in NI. Children's services plans provide a framework for preventative and early intervention services aimed at improving the health and social wellbeing of children and their families in local areas.

Similarly, information on the effectiveness of preventative services for older people¹⁰ suggest that the development of a range of services from lunch clubs to more formal preventative initiatives such as hospital discharge and rapid

⁷ International Federation of Social Work (2001) and The Marmot Review: Fair Society, Healthy Lives, Strategic Review of Health Inequalities in England post 2010

⁸ Early Intervention: Good Parents, Great Kids, Better Citizens, 2008, Centre for Social Justice and Smith Institute.

⁹ Reaching Out: Think Family, 2007, Social Exclusion Task Force, Cabinet Office

¹⁰ National Partnership for Older People Projects

response services results in improvements in the quality of life of older people as well as being cost effective.

Social work gives effect to prevention by the early identification of needs and by signposting and connecting people to resources that can help them. Through, for example, community development approaches, social work also contributes to strategies and the delivery of actions that militate against the social factors that create and reinforce inequalities such as poverty, social exclusion, dependency or social isolation. Developing the capacity of communities maximises people's independence and problem-solving abilities and promotes community cohesion.

Early intervention is also about intervening earlier in the lives of children and vulnerable adults to prevent situations deteriorating or before actual harm occurs. For instance working with a parent with poor mental health should be a trigger to assess the risks to the children and to consider preventative action. Similarly, observation and knowledge of a vulnerable adult's demeanor and behaviour allows the social worker to be alert to changes that may indicate abuse. Early intervention can help people remain in their own homes for as long as they wish and it is safe and appropriate to do so.

3.3 Empowerment

Empowerment: contributing to a fairer, more inclusive and prosperous society by enabling people to:

- develop their capacity to be independent and self-sufficient; and
- have more control over their lives.

Social workers work with many people who are marginalised or isolated within, or excluded from society. Social workers help people build, strengthen and maintain relationships and social networks and to improve community cohesion. They promote the rights and welfare of individuals; facilitate access to the services to which people are entitled and lobby for improvements in the accessibility and availability of services. Where necessary, they advocate on behalf of people, help to defend them against unjustified intervention and they challenge prejudice and discrimination.

Government policies are increasingly emphasising the importance of self-directed care in which people retain power and control to develop their own care arrangements and supports. Social work promotes partnership working with service users and carers, supports people to become self-sufficient and to live their lives with greater independence and autonomy. It does this by working with people to develop their skills and confidence in making decisions and managing their own life, by recognising and building on people's strengths and by encouraging people to express their views about how they want to live their lives. Promoting and supporting independence can prevent or delay the need for formal intervention or more intensive or institutional care for people.

Social work has contributed to the government policy of supporting people with learning disabilities or mental health problems to move out of long-stay psychiatric hospital care to live independently in the community. Social workers facilitate the active participation of these individuals in a range of day care services and encourage uptake of adult learning opportunities and engagement in everyday activities such as attendance at the local leisure centres, going to the cinema or joining a night class at the local college.

Whilst empowering people to live independent lives is an essential role for social work it also involves continually assessing and balancing risks. Social workers will facilitate and enable vulnerable adults in situations where living with a risk is outweighed by the benefit of having a lifestyle the individual chooses and where such risk-taking is viewed as a positive choice.

There is a relationship and interdependency between improving the health and social wellbeing of people, enhancing their capacity to work and increasing the economic competitiveness and prosperity of a society. People's employability improves if they have a good level of education and training. Research shows that educational outcomes for children in state care and for people from poorer socio-economic groups are lower than for other groups in society. Offenders, people with disabilities or mental health problems, can also experience barriers to employment. Social work makes an important contribution to supporting children and adults to realise their potential through enabling their engagement in education and training, the development of skills, achievement of qualifications and participation in the workplace.

Social work supports children, including children in care, to realise their potential through regular participation in education so they have better opportunities and life chances in the future.

4,196 pupils were referred to the EWS in 2008/09.

3.4 Care and support

Care and support : contributing to a caring and compassionate society by:

- helping vulnerable people to live safe and fulfilling lives, engage in meaningful and valued activity and be as independent as possible; and
- promoting social inclusion of marginalised or excluded people within society.

Care and support are fundamental to the role of social workers. Care and support takes many different forms. It may involve providing advice, giving information, helping people to help themselves, facilitating access to other services, supporting self-directed care, arranging provision of practical support, problem solving, emotional support, advocacy, mediation, counselling or other specialist therapeutic interventions. It means working with individuals in a person-centred way to support them to find solutions to their problems and to make informed choices and decisions about how they live their lives. Care and support is not just about providing a pre-existing service, such as a day care or domiciliary care service.

Government policy has supported care in the community for many years which aims to enable people in need to live as normal a life as possible and to receive care and treatment within their own homes or in local community facilities rather than institutions or hospitals.

The majority of people want to stay in their own homes even when they become frail or infirm or have complex care needs. In these situations social work works with relatives, friends and other disciplines and agencies to plan and co-ordinate a care package that supports the person with their personal care and in their daily living. Increasingly people are being supported to use Direct Payments to make their own care arrangements. Social workers provide advice, information and support to people choosing to purchase and manage their own care.

Social workers undertake a range of duties and tasks to help people stay in their own homes for as long as possible. Social work does this by assessing need, helping harness and mobilise help from family, friends and the community or organising and co-ordinating care packages for people with complex needs. Importantly, social work can help assure and improve the quality of care by involving people and their carers in planning, delivering and reviewing the care they receive.

Informal carers play a vital role in supporting relatives and friends to live at home. Social workers provide care and support to sustain carers in their caring role for as long as they are able and willing to do so.

Adult Services

- Of **34,780** adults were in contact with HSC Trusts in 2008/09;
 - **13,666** had a mental illness;
 - **10,179** had a learning disability;
 - **10,935** had a physical disability or sensory impairment.
- **12,049** residential or nursing home care packages were in place in 2008/09;
- some **23,553** clients received an estimated 222,393 contact hours of domiciliary care (survey week 21-27 September 2008);
- **9,327** clients were registered for statutory day services at 31 March 2009; and
- over **2,300** individual assessments of carers' needs undertaken in 2008/09.

Children's Services

- **28,440** referrals to Children's Services in 2008/09; these referrals related to **22,380** children; and
- of the **22,380** children referred; **3,117** were dealt with immediately and **16,759** were allocated for further action, services or assessment.

3.5 Protection

Protection: contributing to a safer society by:

- identifying and reducing the risk and/or incidence of harm to children, vulnerable adults and the public; and
- balancing the rights, welfare and best interests of people at risk with the needs and rights of others.

Safeguarding and protecting children and vulnerable adults are key priorities in government policy. Safeguarding incorporates all preventable harm that impacts on people's lives with the aim of improving and protecting health and social wellbeing. Social work, health, education and criminal justice agencies have a lead role to play in preventing, detecting and providing protection to children and/or vulnerable adults. Specifically they seek to ensure that children and vulnerable adults receive protection, support and equitable access to the criminal justice system.

Harm can be caused by neglect, abuse, exploitation, violence or self-harm and occurs across all racial, ethnic and socioeconomic groups. Certain groups of people are however more vulnerable to harm than others such as children who are living in families where there is domestic violence or alcohol or drug dependency or vulnerable adults who cannot protect themselves from harm.

***2,488** children were on the Child Protection Register in NI at 31 March 2009 of which:*

- **706 (28%)** were registered due to neglect;
- **618 (25%)** were registered due to physical abuse;
- **320 (13%)** were registered due to emotional abuse;
- **242 (10%)** were registered due to sexual abuse; and
- **602 (24%)** were registered under more than one category.

***1,390** adult protection referrals were made in NI in 2008/09, with over **1,000** care and protection plans put in place.*

Reporting of children or vulnerable adults who are at risk of harm is complicated by the private and hidden nature of the crime, the ambivalence in society to intervening in people's private lives, the fearfulness and powerlessness of the victim, and strong motivation for denial, secrecy, cover-up or collusion by the perpetrator(s). "Abuse is a clever contract. By its nature, it lives in secrecy. That's how it survives"¹¹. Failure to identify the risk of or signs of abuse and intervene can prove to be life endangering and leave children and vulnerable adults at risk of significant harm.

¹¹ Darren Hayes, Savage Garden.

Statutory duties place social work in the lead role in safeguarding and protecting children and vulnerable adults. This involves identifying and assessing the nature and level of risks, working closely with the police and other agencies as required and implementing actions to reduce and/or manage the risks. Responses need to be proportionate and balance the need to protect people from harm with the rights of people to privacy and autonomy. Where appropriate, responses involve the use of legal powers. These situations are highly complex, often chaotic, fraught with tension and ambiguity and occasionally dangerous.

When a child is unable to continue living at home or it is no longer safe to do so social workers are responsible for arranging appropriate alternative care on a temporary or permanent basis.

*Alternative care was organised for **2,356** children in 2007/08 of which:*

- **1,389** were living with foster parents;
- **566** were living with relatives;
- **283** were living in residential care; and
- **118** were living in other accommodation.
- **102** domestic adoptions, **66** step parent/family adoptions and **64** Freeing Orders were granted¹²; and
- **22** inter-country adoption applications were processed in 2007/08.

Safeguarding children and vulnerable adults requires assessment and continuous reassessment to understand the dynamics, interdependencies and relationships within situations and to identify any changes in the indicators or levels of risk. In nearly every case where children or vulnerable adults are under threat there will also be family members or others who resent the intrusion of social workers into their lives. While endeavouring to build and maintain constructive relationships with people who feel their rights to a family life or privacy are being challenged, the child or adult who is at risk must remain the prime focus. Social workers are skilled at managing conflict in these difficult and often volatile situations.

Many others also have a part to play in safeguarding and protecting children and vulnerable adults. Professionals, such as doctors, nurses, health visitors, teachers, youth and community workers, allied health professionals, as well as the wide network of agencies, organisations, bodies and communities of interest across the voluntary, community, private and faith sectors have key roles.

Safeguarding and protection also requires the support of families and carers and the general public, who, through general good neighbourliness and acts of citizenship, can help children and vulnerable adults who are at risk in the community. For social workers, engaging with others and appropriately sharing and obtaining information are fundamental in managing and reducing the risk of harm to children, vulnerable adults and the wider public.

¹² A Freeing Order granted by the court permits a Trust to place a child for adoption, in the majority of cases, without parental consent. Freeing applications are normally heard by the High Court and are amongst the most contested public care proceedings in which social workers are involved.

Social workers play a key role in the Public Protection Arrangements for NI. These arrangements require criminal justice agencies, social services and others to work together and share information to effectively assess and manage the risk posed by sexual and violent offenders and potentially dangerous persons.

Social workers, working as Probation Officers in the PBNI, supervise offenders released from prison on life licence. They monitor the person in the community and using approved assessment instruments assess and manage risks of reoffending and/or harm to the public.

In situations where an offender engages in behaviour, such as excessive alcohol consumption, that increases the risk of reoffending or harm to others, the Probation Officer can make a recommendation to the Secretary of State to recall the offender to prison in order to protect the public.

On recall, further therapeutic intervention may be undertaken to rehabilitate and return the offender to the community. In undertaking this work Probation Officers help prevent further crimes; minimise risk to potential victims; and assist and challenge the offender to recognise and manage the situations and behaviours that increase the risks of reoffending.

Social work also plays a wider role in promoting and building safer communities by working with other agencies to help people in neighbourhoods which are affected by serious incidents in the community. Examples over the past years include major bombings, flooding of homes, racist intimidation of families and outbreaks of secretarian violence.

Social work responds to crisis situations and co-ordinates help for communities under stress. Social workers help families who are forced out of their homes and ensure people's immediate needs are met. They offer support and information to help people access the right help and make choices about their immediate and future options. Where appropriate they advocate on their behalf, offer emotional support to help people affected by trauma and organise practical support for people to either return home or find alternative accommodation.

Social work makes an important contribution in helping individuals and families live safely and with stability, including those who are affected by exploitation or human trafficking. There is an increasing incidence of children (some of whom may be unaccompanied) and adults coming to NI against their will, being trafficked for sexual or labour exploitation or domestic servitude. Social workers work closely with the UK Human Trafficking Centre, the UK Border Agency, the police, Housing Executive, healthcare colleagues and voluntary sector providers to ensure the welfare and safety of victims of trafficking.

3.6 Control

Control: contributing to a safer society by:

- securing the safety, health and social wellbeing of people who have been harmed, are at risk of being harmed or are at risk of harming others; and
- helping manage people's behaviour that puts themselves or others at risk.

Social workers initiate legal proceedings where failure to do so would result in significant harm or where harm has already occurred. Social workers do not and cannot make these decisions in isolation. The decision to remove a child permanently from the care of his/her parents to a place of safety requires authorisation of the judiciary. Securing the admission of an individual to a psychiatric hospital for assessment without their consent is undertaken in partnership with the medical profession.

In 2007/08 in NI:

- ***2,470*** Children were looked after by HSC Trusts under full or interim Care Orders or on an accommodated basis; and
- ***1,187*** applications for compulsory admission to hospital for an assessment of mental condition were made.

Removing or restricting people's rights is highly sensitive and complex. It involves:

- gathering and presenting evidence;
- making judgements about consent and capacity;
- participating in court proceedings where required;
- acting in the best interests of the individual;
- seeking the least restrictive method of intervention;
- exercising statutory powers; and
- ensuring the individual's rights continue to be respected and promoted while at the same time having regard to the rights and safety of others.

Social workers in the PBNI prepare assessments for Courts, Parole Commissioners and other decision makers, work in prisons to assist in the assessment and preparation of prisoners for release and supervise offenders in the community on court orders and licences.

- ***PBNI prepare over 9,000 assessments each year for Courts, Parole Commissioners and other decision-making bodies.***
- ***On any given day there are 4,000 people subject to court orders or licences in NI supervised by the PBNI.***

Working with people to manage risky behaviours involves elements of prevention and early intervention, empowerment, care and support and protection and control. It requires social workers to be skilled in understanding and assessing human behaviour and in making professional judgements about situations that may have potentially life-threatening consequences.

In discharging their statutory responsibilities, social workers have to be skilled in advocating for the best interests and welfare of service users in formal decision making forums, such as care conferences, tribunals and courts. They must be confident and able to withstand and, in turn, challenge others such as the judiciary, medical experts, parents, carers, other professionals and, on occasion, their employer when they believe decisions or plans are not, in their professional opinion, in the best interests of service users or the protection of the public.

3.7 Social work – a systemic approach

A systemic approach involves understanding people's lives from the individual's perspective and from the perspective of others. It involves an understanding of a person's character, motivation, capacity to grow and develop, how the person interacts with others, how others interact with them, the sources of support in their life and the availability of supports in the immediate and wider environment. It involves accurate assessments of risk and balancing that risk and potential danger to others in any plans made or services provided.

This involves the ability to draw together a diverse range of options, critically analyse information, form a professional judgement and develop, agree and implement actions that are person-centred, promote choice and independence and at the same time help keep people safe. It also involves the ability to mobilise services and negotiate and co-ordinate agreed inputs.

Central to the social work process is the ability of the social worker to form relationships with people, to use their skills flexibly and intervene appropriately to meet people's needs and help keep them or others safe from harm.

Research into public attitudes to HSC services in NI¹³ indicated that out of those who had direct experience of the services of social workers in the previous 12 months, 79% were satisfied with the services.

¹³ Public Attitudes to Health and Social Care Services in Northern Ireland, DHSSPS, November 2009

Feedback from other surveys and consultations consistently highlight that people's satisfaction with social work as a service is influenced as much by people's experience of the relationship, attitude, approach and interaction with the social worker as by the actual service provided.¹⁴

People are positive about social workers who:

- ***develop a meaningful relationship with them based on empathy;***
- ***can be trusted and treat them with respect and honesty;***
- ***put them at the centre;***
- ***focus on their abilities and strengths as well as on their problems;***
- ***support them to make informed choices and decisions;***
- ***help them get the services and benefits they are entitled to; and***
- ***are dependable and don't give up on them where others have.***

People who use social work services have a wide range of needs which cannot be dealt with in isolation and which need the input and expertise of other disciplines and agencies. Social work is therefore most effective when it works in collaboration with other professionals and agencies, public bodies and government departments. This requires social workers to be skilled brokers and negotiators across professional and organisational boundaries and ensures they are best placed to navigate the complexity of individual, family, local and regional networks to deliver an effective and holistic service to people and their carers.

Social work models and theories that have developed over the past few decades have been based on strengths or resilience perspectives which focus on the capabilities of the individual and their place in the context of their overall environment.

Figure 2 shows individuals and families within their community and wider social context and illustrates the range of different disciplines and agencies that may be involved in contributing to improving people's social wellbeing.

¹⁴ Department's survey NISCC (2009) People Work not just Paperwork

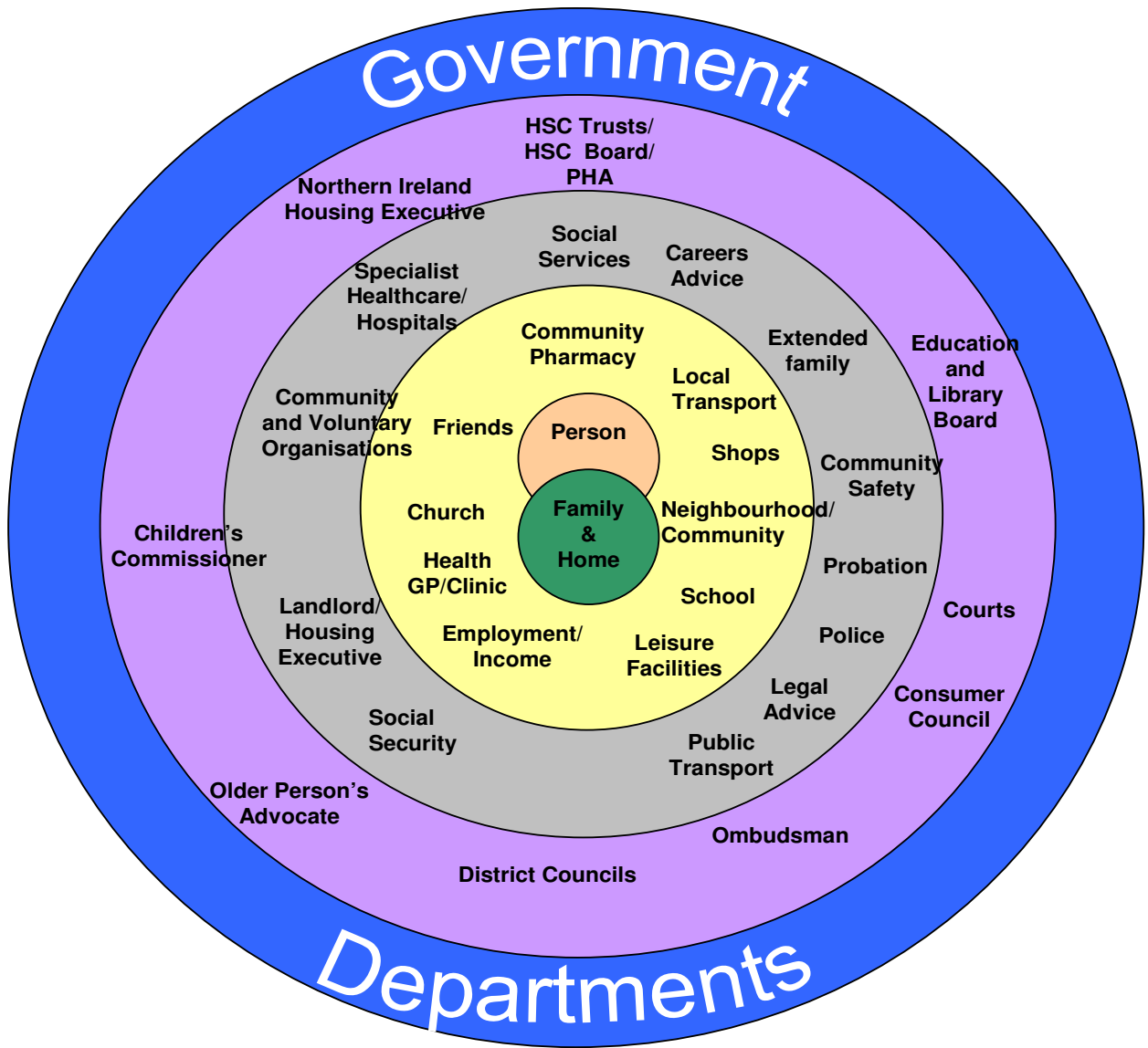


Figure 2

SECTION 4: SOCIAL WORK - STRATEGIC PRIORITIES AND PROFESSIONAL IMPERATIVES

4.1 Strategic priorities and professional imperatives

NI has undergone significant changes as a society since the establishment of the NI Assembly in 1998. Political, economic, social and demographic changes as well as major organisational restructuring of the HSC (as part of the RPA) have created new challenges for social work.

These challenges include:

- changes in roles, ways of working and expectations of social work;
- growing numbers of referrals and increasing complexity of work;
- different approaches to the delivery and management of social work services;
- public, political and media responses following high profile tragedies;
- retention difficulties in specific practice areas;
- lack of understanding of the social work role and what can realistically be expected of social workers; and
- the need to demonstrate the effectiveness of social work in improving outcomes.

This strategy aims to strengthen social work as a professional service that contributes to the delivery of government policy to improve the health, social wellbeing and safety of individuals, families and communities. It is designed to support social work to deliver on its professional agenda and to respond to the challenges faced by the profession.

The strategy seeks to:

- provide greater clarity about the role of social work;
- reinforce the difference social work makes on people's lives within the context of key policy drivers;
- explain how social work is organised in NI; and
- identify priorities to improve the management, delivery and governance of social work and address the challenges facing the profession.

It is intended for all social workers and their employers in all settings or sectors.

The strategy identifies priorities, associated actions and first steps for strengthening the 'delivery system' for social work over the next 10 years. It is intended to provide a strategic direction for social work in a changing environment now and into the future. The expectation is that all key parts of the 'delivery system' will work together to plan and implement this strategy.

The implementation of the strategy priorities will:

- strengthen professional leadership and governance;
- develop more flexible and responsive services;
- ensure a safer, more effective service;
- improve understanding of the role and contribution of social work in improving and protecting people's social wellbeing; and
- promote confidence and trust in the profession.

The strategic priorities cover the following areas:

1. Valuing the workforce, building confidence.
2. Leading the profession, managing practice.
3. Building capacity, meeting demand.
4. User-friendly services, flexible working.
5. Adding value, delivering outcomes.
6. Promoting high standards, managing risk.
7. Promoting trust, fostering understanding.

4.2 **Strategic Priority 1: Valuing the workforce, building confidence**

We will support social workers to feel valued and confident in carrying out their work.

The delivery of a high quality social work service is dependent on the competence, confidence and commitment of staff. Much is expected of social workers. The work they do is challenging and difficult. It can be emotionally distressing and on occasion dangerous. Over time this can have a negative impact on staff. The absence of effective management and supervision can leave workers feeling unsupported, undervalued and de-skilled which lowers morale and this in turn can impact on the quality of their practice.

While the whole 'delivery system' for social work has a responsibility to support the profession, employers and managers have a central role in ensuring social workers at different stages in their career have the right support. With the right supports social workers will feel valued by their employers, confident in their role and more resilient to deal with the pressures and risks associated with the work.

One of the ways to demonstrate that professional social workers are valued is to make sure their skills are recognised and the amount of time they spend practising social work is maximised and the amount of time they have to spend on administrative and bureaucratic tasks is minimised.

Supporting social workers requires:

- agreed standards for employers to ensure the appropriate supports are in place to ensure the safety and welfare of social workers across all programmes of care;
- investment in measures to tackle violence against social workers;
- a healthy working environment with appropriate administrative, ICT infrastructure and technological support;
- reducing bureaucracy for practising social workers and ensuring required administrative tasks are factored into workload weighting; and
- streamlining information gathering and reporting mechanisms to ensure that relevant information is gathered efficiently and effectively.

First Steps

We will:

- **develop standards for employers to promote regional consistency in supports for social workers in different settings and sectors;**
- **develop risk assessment and prevention strategies to support the safety of social workers in their daily practice; and**
- **undertake a review of practice reporting requirements and opportunities to minimise duplication.**

4.3 **Strategic Priority 2: Leading the profession, managing practice**

We will develop strong professional leadership and management to support and empower staff to deliver safe and effective social work services.

Social work needs to be able to discharge its responsibilities to those who are vulnerable in society effectively. Professional leadership and management of frontline staff are essential if we are to achieve this.

Management spans of responsibility have increased alongside rising demands, increasing complexity and risk, expectations for higher quality services and improved outcomes. At the same time there is a need for strong professional leadership due to the changed environment, greater emphasis on integrated working and the political, public and media spotlight when things go wrong.

Professional leadership and management are critical to ensuring safe, high standards of social work practice. While managers are readily identified through job roles, professional leadership is linked as much to the person's expertise and credibility as to their job role. Professional leaders are therefore as likely to be found in practitioner roles as those in management posts. Social workers in specialist, senior and principal practitioner posts are expected to provide professional leadership alongside management colleagues. Together these practitioners and managers are the formal leaders of the profession within organisations and share responsibility to support and empower staff to deliver a safe, effective, high quality social work service.

Good quality professional supervision is essential in helping practitioners manage risk and make decisions, improve and reflect on their practice and to cope with the pressure and challenge of their work. It is imperative that front line workers across all programmes of care have access to regular, good quality professional supervision and support.

Building the leadership and management capacity of the profession is crucial. Progression into management needs to be an attractive and rewarding career option for experienced social workers alongside other practitioner career pathways. We need to ensure that social workers with high ability and drive are available to provide professional leadership in managerial, practice and specialist posts.

Developing professional leadership and management capacity requires:

- organisational and administrative structures to support and facilitate social work leaders in management and practitioner posts to effectively discharge their professional responsibilities;
- an agreed framework for the development of social work leadership and management skills;
- effective succession planning and promotion of social work management as an attractive career option, alongside other practitioner career pathways; and

- robust standards and procedures for professional supervision to ensure staff are supported to deliver a safe and effective social work service within an integrated HSC system.

First Steps

We will:

- **develop a leadership development programme for senior professionals in social work;**
- **develop a structured programme of career development opportunities through a job rotation scheme for middle and senior managers/professionals;**
- **ensure access to effective supervision and performance appraisal training for first line managers and other relevant staff in all programmes of care to agreed regional standards; and**
- **promote management as an attractive and rewarding career option for experienced social workers.**

Strategic Priority 3: Building capacity, meeting demand.

We will improve planning to identify the right type and numbers of staff to meet service demand.

Changing demographics, a society emerging from conflict and the increasing diversity of the NI population are impacting on the demand for social work services.

There is evidence¹⁵ that there has been a 33% increase in referrals to children's services since between 2004 – 2009, with a 7% in 2008/09 alone. This increase includes a 25% in child protection referrals.

With the fastest growing elderly population in the UK, demand for care and support in NI is predicted to rise significantly in the years to come. Health and social care needs arising from arthritis, stroke, mental impairment, hearing and vision loss and dementia, will increase concomitantly with an increase in numbers of older people. It is estimated there are 16,000 people with dementia in NI today and this figure is projected to increase to 20,500 by 2017 and 47,000 by 2051.

There is currently a stable supply of qualified social workers to meet projected workforce needs. However public approbation when things go wrong, coupled with increasing demands, highly complex cases and heightened expectations, impact on the morale and stress levels of social workers in the service. This can have an effect on sickness rates, absenteeism and ultimately on the recruitment and retention of social workers.

Senior social work practitioner grades were introduced in 1994. Principal social work practitioner grades were introduced in specified children's services in 2007. The aim was to provide a practitioner career structure to help retain experience and expertise in front-line practice at the same time as strengthening professional management and leadership capacity. It is important that this expertise is available to support the increasing demand and complexity of work in adult as well as children's services.

Matching capacity with demand requires:

- more sophisticated workforce planning to ensure that the supply and deployment of social workers remains in step with projected demand;
- targeted approaches to recruitment in areas where frontline or management posts are hard to fill;
- targeted approaches to support the retention and deployment of experienced staff across all programmes of care and in specialist practice areas;
- more effective and transparent workload weighting, allocation and management systems in each programme of care;

¹⁵ DHSSPS, Children Order Statistical Table for Northern Ireland (2008/09)

- a workforce which reflects the needs of a more diverse population; and
- effective deployment of senior and principal social work practitioners across Children's and Adult Services to support the delivery of safe and effective frontline practice.

First Steps

We will:

- **review the contribution of senior and principal practitioners to inform future plans for their deployment with a specific view to creating Principal Practitioner posts within Adult Services for the first time;**
- **develop effective workload weighting systems in each programme of care to support safe practice and inform workforce needs; and**
- **develop and implement a system for predicting levels of supply and demand for social workers.**

4.5

Strategic Priority 4: User-friendly services, flexible working

We will design and deliver social work services around the needs of the people who use them, making the best use of resources.

Safety, quality, effectiveness and the experience of people who use services are at the heart of the modernisation agenda. They also reflect public expectations and professional aspirations.

People expect a lot of social work and rightly so. They expect social workers to be available and accessible when they need them. And they expect social work to be delivered to a consistent standard of quality.

Accessibility of services is about the balance between thresholds of need and levels of demand as well as the availability of alternative services to which people can be signposted.

The majority of community based social work services are designed to run 9 to 5 over a 5 day week. Many people who need to speak with a social worker on their own or on someone else's behalf often work similar hours. This either means social workers work overtime to see people outside these times or alternatively people have to take time off work to see a social worker.

Evidence tells us that personal or family crises, emergency admissions of children into care, suicide attempts, serious adverse incidents, emergency mental health assessments and applications for secure accommodation for young people can happen at any time, often at night or weekends. Out of hours crises are dealt with by an out of hours duty worker often with no knowledge of the individual or their circumstances.

The reforms under RPA have put a greater emphasis on multidisciplinary team working and partnership working with people who use services. This is reflected in the policy directions to support more individual approaches to the provision of health and social care services. In Children's Services it is vital that the child's voice is properly heard in decisions that affect his or her life. In services for adults, the trend is to plan and design services to fit around people's lives, to involve them in co-producing their own solutions and to use technological advances to support independent living.

Responsive and flexible services requires:

- building on the RPA principles to realise improvements in service design, integrated working and resource realignment;
- more responsive services, including the promotion of self-directed care, based on the views of people who use and deliver services;
- more flexible working patterns to meet needs and changing expectations;

- pro-active use of technology to transform the delivery of services; and
- the exploration of new approaches to inter-disciplinary, interagency and community relationships to facilitate and strengthen joint working and partnership arrangements.

First Steps

We will:

- **design a model and regional standards for a dedicated out of hours social work service; and**
- **establish 5 new pilot schemes to examine different ways of providing services including team models of working, extended opening hours and flexible working patterns.**

4.6

Strategic Priority 5: Adding value, delivering outcomes

We will develop a culture of continuous improvement, building the knowledge base for good practice and evidencing the difference social work makes in people's lives.

Expenditure on social work services in NI is significant. It is important that this investment is targeted and used in ways that are effective in meeting people's needs.

This requires social work to clearly demonstrate what it does and the difference it makes in people's lives. The evaluation of the outcomes of social work intervention must actively involve service users. It is also needs to demonstrate stronger links between inputs, outputs and outcomes and the effective use of resources.

Practitioners should have access to up-to-date research and evidence to inform their practice decisions. They should also be supported to reflect on and continuously improve their practice and engage in both on-the-job learning and formal training.

Governance and regulatory requirements have increased significantly over recent years along with an increase in information and reporting requirements. Commissioning arrangements also require and generate a significant amount of information. All of this information should be collated and used to make sure we invest in services that actually deliver the outcomes we wish to see achieved.

Evaluating and evidencing outcomes requires:

- more effective and sensitive information management systems to monitor the effectiveness and quality of social work intervention and demonstrate outcomes, achievement and value for money;
- better information systems to inform service development, forward planning, commissioning and performance management;
- development of tools to evaluate the outcomes of social work practice including mechanisms for gathering feedback from people who use services;
- strengthen the use of audit, applied research and development of and access to evidence of best practice;
- support for social workers to engage in reflective practice and undertake continuous professional development;
- maximise opportunities for on-the-job learning including web based learning; and
- increase opportunities for practitioners, people using services and carers to gain research skills and undertake research themselves.

First Steps

We will:

- **appoint a regional professional research lead to develop research capacity and activity in the social work workforce across all programmes of care;**
- **increase the skills and capacity of managers, experienced practitioners and trainers to provide on-the-job coaching and support reflective practice; and**
- **pilot the use of action learning models as a means of encouraging continuous improvement, learning and peer support.**

4.7

Strategic Priority 6: Promoting high standards, managing risk

We will ensure that professional governance arrangements support social workers to work to consistently high standards and manage risks effectively.

There is no such thing as risk free social work practice. Social workers cannot guarantee that children or vulnerable adults will never be harmed. Nor can they guarantee that people who are intent on harming themselves or others can be prevented from doing this. What social work can do is identify, minimise and manage the risk of people being harmed, harming themselves or harming others. Managing risk effectively is critical to social work practice and this cannot be done by social work alone. Protection of children and vulnerable adults is everyone's responsibility.

As a regulated profession, registered social workers are individually accountable for the standard of their practice with each and every individual. Social workers need to understand the implications of this for their conduct and practice, for managing risk and, where appropriate, for challenging others whose actions or decisions may compromise people's safety or social wellbeing or violate their rights or entitlements.

Registered social workers must comply with the NISCC Code of Practice. This code describes the standards of conduct and practice for all social care workers registered with the NISCC. It does not specifically recognise the statutory responsibilities or levels of accountability carried by social workers. Given the far-reaching consequences of decisions that can fundamentally affect the future course of people's lives it is imperative that social workers have robust standards of conduct and practice that reflect the responsibilities they carry on behalf of the state.

In addition employers need to make sure that social workers are supported in discharging the full range of their duties and in managing risk by having in place robust professional governance arrangements. This requires clear lines of professional accountability from the frontline of practice to the boardroom, regular supervision, access to relevant training and research findings as well as mechanisms to share learning and best practice.

Ensuring effective and robust professional governance requires:

- clear professional accountability arrangements to oversee the operation of the Schemes for the Discharge of Delegated Statutory Functions;
- robust professional governance arrangements from frontline practice to the most senior levels in the organisation to ensure safe, high standards of practice and management of risk and to enable employers to discharge their duty of care;
- clear understanding of the professional responsibilities and accountabilities of registered social workers by practitioners, managers, employers and non-executive board members; and
- evidence based risk assessment and management tools and training for staff in their application.

First Steps

We will:

- **review the implementation of social care governance arrangements across Children's and Adult Services with a view to strengthening professional lines of accountability through the Director of Social Work;**
- **develop a strategy to ensure all registered social workers understand their professional responsibilities and accountabilities as a regulated profession; and**
- **develop a distinct Code of Practice for social work.**

4.8

Strategic Priority 7: Promoting trust, fostering understanding

We will promote a greater understanding by the public of the contribution of social work in improving the safety and social wellbeing of individuals, families and communities.

Public expectations of social work are high and media scrutiny has never been greater. While those with direct experience of social work services are generally satisfied, social work as a profession is often criticised by the press for apparently interfering too much in certain circumstances and not doing enough in others. Social work is blamed when things go wrong and when others have behaved in unpredictable, unreasonable, and on occasion, violent and abusive ways with sometimes fatal consequences. This affects the morale of social workers as well as impacting on public trust in the profession.

Public understanding of social work is largely based on media coverage of the small number of cases where things have gone tragically wrong. The positive side of social work is rarely profiled. 'Good news' stories are often not considered to be 'news' by newspaper editors. 'Good news' social work stories lack immediacy as the impact of decisions and interventions may only be known months or years later. It is therefore not surprising that the public is critical of social work given its knowledge is based on high profile failings of the service rather than a broader understanding of what social workers do.

There is a need to foster a better understanding about the role of social work and the successful work that goes on every day. This needs social workers to be confident and articulate in explaining what they do on behalf of society and what can realistically be expected of them.

Promoting trust and fostering understanding requires:

- the involvement of people who use services, carers and communities in communicating the contribution and difference social work makes to people's lives;
- a comprehensive communication plan to ensure more accessible information about the range and scope of social work activities and to highlight good practice;
- promotion of social work as a worthwhile and rewarding career;
- social workers who are politically and media aware and have the competence and confidence to represent and reflect their work and the difference it makes to the media and general public; and
- clear articulation of the role of social work and its contribution to improving the social wellbeing of vulnerable groups.

First Steps

We will:

- **increase and develop the skills and confidence of social workers to effectively represent social work in the media and to the general public;**
- **develop a Communication Strategy to promote the value and contribution of social work to individuals, families and communities in NI; and**
- **involve people who use services in communicating the contribution and difference social work makes in people's lives.**

SECTION 5: IMPLEMENTING THE STRATEGY

5.1 The way forward

This is the first strategy for social work in Northern Ireland. It has been informed by evidence, government policy, the views of frontline social workers, people who have direct experience of social work as well as a wide range of stakeholders. The strategy reflects the Department's commitment to social work as a valued and valuable profession making an important contribution to the delivery of government policy.

The strategic priorities and associated first steps set out a challenging and ambitious agenda. Successful implementation will require the commitment and co-operation of government departments, employers, service commissioners, social work regulators, education providers and staff organisations as well as social workers themselves.

It will also require the input of people who have direct experience of social workers and social work services. Their perspectives and expectations must inform and influence developments as they are brought forward.

Successful implementation will require dedicated and strong leadership and sustained effort and drive over the next few years in order to realise the strategy's full potential. An overarching implementation plan with timescales will be developed which will be reviewed and updated annually with a focus on achieving outcomes and monitoring the progressive impact of the strategy.

Given the importance of the strategy for the profession, its implementation will be overseen by a Steering Group, chaired by the CSSO reporting to the Minister. Membership of the Steering Group will include senior representatives from all key stakeholders reflecting the need for collective ownership and action across the social work 'delivery system'.

Communication will be an integral element of the implementation plan to ensure the achievements, progress and impact of the strategy are charted and shared.

5.2 Resourcing the Strategy

It is anticipated that some of the actions required can be achieved by doing things differently and will have no resource consequences. For other actions some resources will be required but it is anticipated that these can be realised from reconfiguration of existing resources committed to supporting social work.

5.3 Conclusion

Social work is a skilled profession that offers a comprehensive and flexible service to individuals, families and communities. This strategy will provide direction for the profession and ensure a focus on supporting frontline staff to deliver a safe, effective, high quality social work service through challenging times.