

ADSW Conference 2012 - Presidential Address

Peter MacLeod

Good morning conference and welcome once again to Crieff Hydro. I am delighted to see you all here and welcome you as the 30th president of ADSW.

Becoming President of ADSW at the AGM in May was a huge honour for me and caused me to reflect back on my career to the point at which I decided to become a social worker. My brother and his wife had trained as social workers and my father, who had dementia, relied on support from social services. I saw firsthand the difference it could make to people's lives and also what a rewarding career it could be. 20 or so years on, I still reap those benefits and believe in social work as strongly now as I did then. I believe that social work works.

Every past president I've spoken to has given me advice on how to run the association, but a common theme is to concentrate on a few issues and make a difference with them. It will be no surprise to conference that the issue I will be focussing on and indeed have focussed on for the last 2 years is the integration of health and social care.

As a social worker I want what is best for the people who need support. That's it. I have no vested interest beyond that. As an experienced professional, I have a view as to how to achieve the best services for people and it is my view that social work contributes hugely to the lives of people across Scotland every day. I am supportive of any move to improve those lives.

The integration of health and social care is the biggest change facing social work services in Scotland for over 40 years. I don't want social work, the real value of social work and the contribution that social workers and carers make to the lives of 650 000 people every year in Scotland to be lost, diminished or underestimated. And, as a social worker with the best interests of people that are supported by our services as my only concern, I reserve the right to stand up for that.

When the issue of integration started to feature in manifesto debates back at the Labour Party Conference in Oban in October 2010, ADSW were already discussing it. Integration is not a new phenomenon and social work and health services across Scotland all have experience of integration to some extent. As the pre-Holyrood election campaigning got into full swing it was clear that there was consensus across the 3 main parties that some form of health and social care integration was desired. But, there was a lack of evidence to support the varying notions of what would work.

On behalf of ADSW, I commissioned Prof Alison Petch of IRISS to review the evidence of what had worked and what had not in terms of integrating health and social care services within the UK and beyond. We based our position on that evidence. Evidence which clearly states that structural change will not bring about better outcomes for older people.

Yet, in my view that is what the consultation document issued by the Cabinet Secretary on 8 May actually proposes. In fact I believe that the proposals in the government's consultation paper represent the biggest reorganisation of local authority services for several decades – bigger than reorganisation in 1996. Think about it: adult social care services represent around 70% of each council's social work budget and around 18% of their total budget. This magnitude of reorganisation will have a significant impact. That does not mean that we should not do it. It does mean though that we must get it right: we cannot afford for a change of this proportion to go wrong.

We have come a long way since Shona Robison announced the transfer of 38 000 council workers to the NHS in February 2011. At that point the Government were looking at prescribing a model for integration that councils and the NHS would have to adopt and the Labour party were also looking at a single agency.

So ADSW saw the Cabinet Secretary's announcement in December 2011 which emphasised that successful integration was about 'localism' and 'leadership' rather than centrally driven reform as a very positive move and I do think that this recognition was influenced by the work done by IRISS and ADSW.

But I do have concerns.

Clearly we are in a consultation period and we have time to air our concerns and discuss them in detail with government, but I want to draw your attention to 3 principled issues which I think government should be mindful of when considering the drafting of legislation: democratic accountability, consolidation of care, and the underlying principles of social work.

We must recognise the need to ensure adequate levels of democratic accountability through elected members and grasp the opportunity of delivery of better outcomes through refreshed community planning arrangements and single outcome agreements. We are seeing moves in all areas of policy towards allowing people more choice and control over the services they receive. Democratic accountability is an extension of this. The more we devolve decision making to local people, the more chance we have of delivering the services that people really need. That's what local government is good at. That's why we have local government. That's why the involvement of elected members is so crucial in the new health and social care partnerships.

As we seek to integrate health and social care we also must be mindful of not 'disintegrating' the 'integrated' social work care services we have in Scotland. Let me remind you that the Kilbrandon commission in the 1960's reflected on the arrangements then in place – i.e. separate probation, child and adult welfare departments. Kilbrandon then formed the basis for the 1968 Social Work (Scotland) Act which created community social work and integrated care.

To quote a former president of ADSW there was a recognition that 'human problems seldom come singly' and services should meet needs in the context of what a family or community needs. It is my direct experience that the most 'challenged' families have older members requiring support – perhaps they are kinship carers, they will have people with addiction and offending problems and their children will require care. We can't afford to 'fracture' these services in order to integrate others – there are risks inherent to this.

It has been tried in England and they are in the process of reversing it: of the 150 English local authorities some 30 (20%) of them have moved in the last 5 years from separate adult and children's services departments to reintegrate into 'whole life care' services.

All we need to do is look at the evidence, what works. As I said before , we cannot afford to get this wrong.

The last area that I hope the forthcoming bill will take cognisance of is the way social work works. Social work and health are different. Of course they are. They contribute different things and both are essential to people who require care and support. In bringing them together we need to ensure that neither is diluted. For this to work it has to be a partnership and play to the strengths of all the constituent parts. We must however protect the identity of social work and the role of the CSWO and continue to innovate, transform and integrate. It's what social work does and does well. Let us not take forward 'structural reorganisation' only to discover that we have to 'reinvent' community social work – particularly given the 'drastic' impact of welfare reform on the vulnerable.

There are great opportunities to grasp in integration but they are not about structures or legislation – they are about people. The people who provide services working better together and the people who receive services having more choice and control over the services they receive.

Social work services in Scotland work! The evidence of this is legion – inspections, care accolades – the 30,000 in residential and nursing care, the 16,000 looked after children and the total of 650,000 people that rely on Social Work services in Scotland. These services are provided by a workforce of 190,000: larger than that of NHS Scotland . Of course there is room for improvement and we have seen things that have gone wrong. However the sheer complexity and size of the task providing protective and care services to this number of people in need is remarkable and should be celebrated!

My year as president looks to be interesting if nothing else.

Now, while colleagues urged me to focus on a few issues, I am well aware that there is more happening in social work than integration, although I would proffer that nothing will go by unaffected by it.

In my own council of Renfrewshire, it has been a tough year as myself and colleagues have had to deal with the tragic circumstances of the death of Declan Hainey. You are all aware of the national coverage given following this little boy's mother's conviction for murder and reporting on the significant case review. It is of course the mark of a civilised society that our community was shocked by Declan's death and correct that local and national government and the public at large sought to scrutinise the involvement of services with Declan and his mother. I did not agree with all of the media coverage of the circumstances but through the efforts of Tim Huntingford, our Independent Chair, Andrew Lowe and others I saw a much more balanced approach that sought to understand the complex and challenging work involved in the protection of Scotland's children. Any tragedy like this is one too many and we were once again starkly reminded of the toll that parental drug and alcohol abuse is having on our vulnerable children.

We have a full legislative programme ahead of us in criminal justice, community care and children and families areas and packed workplans for the 6 ADSW standing committees. Our conference programme reflects the varied and full agenda we have before us over the coming year. And I'm sure you will find things to challenge you, inform you and surprise you over the next 2 days.

Before I conclude my speech this morning, I'd like to record some thanks.

I'd like to pay particular thanks to David Crawford – my colleague for over 20 years who has given me his support and provided me the opportunities that have brought me to the privileged position of being able to service you as president.

I also want to thank Andrew Lowe for his leadership and support – I think we formed a great team and achieved much together. Andrew's track record as past president speaks for itself – his delivery of the Petch report on international research on integration and the timely publication of the ADSW position statement – or 9 point plan – have been of central importance in informing the debate. His

drive in relation to Self Directed Support (and the empowerment of individuals and communities) and the linking up with other social care services directors in the rest of the U.K. (particularly following the Southern Cross crisis) has been notable. Andrew has been an energetic and media savvy president – he has toured this country and attended conferences abroad, and through his links with ADASS took our position statement into the Westminster parliament’s ‘Future Forum’ – and thereby influenced the U.K. government’s thinking on integration. (I should also note that – so as not to have any spare time whatsoever – he has on two occasions acted up as Chief Executive in his council). Andrew was taken ill in April but I am delighted that he is now on the mend and he is here today. Andrew, you have been a fantastic president and ambassador for the association. Thank you.

The greatest compliment I have been paid in my professional career is that I am a bloody good social worker. My promise to conference is that I will remain true to that as I lead ADSW through this year.

I look forward to working with Vice-President Sandy Riddell, the ADSW Executive and staff over the coming year. I wish you an interesting and enthusing conference and thank you for supporting ADSW.
