



Chief Social Work Officer Annual Survey 2021

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Introduction

1. In 2020 and 2021, Social Work Scotland (SWS) published the findings of its first two annual surveys of Chief Social Work Officers. In the autumn 2021, SWS issued its third annual survey to build on the information gathered previously in relation to the context in which CSWOs work and the realities of delivering on the CSWO role (Social Work Scotland 2021). The purpose was to better understand and represent the strengths, challenges and issues associated with the role and for SWS to better advocate for and support the role of CSWOs in Scotland.
2. The role of Chief Social Work Officer was set out in the Local Government etc. (Scotland) Act 1994 and came into effect on 1 April 1996. The role replaced the statutory Director of Social Work to provide strategic and professional leadership in the delivery of social work services. As detailed in national guidance relating to the role, the CSWO should assist local authorities, Health and Social Care Partnerships and partners in understanding the complexities and cross-cutting nature of social work service delivery. This includes, but not restricted to issues such as corporate parenting, child protection, adult protection and the management of high risk offenders. The CSWO also has a critical contribution to make in supporting overall performance improvement and management of corporate risk (Scottish Government 2016).
3. As set out in the 2021 report, Social Work Scotland (SWS) supports CSWOs in their statutory roles through hosting the CSWO committee, which provides a peer support network for CSWO, a forum to consider issues which impact on professional social work practice and issues which are within the remit of the CSWO, and receives items for comment and discussion from other Social Work Scotland groups.

Outline of study

1. As mentioned in the introduction, the purpose of the survey was to understand better the strengths, challenges and issues associated with the role of the Chief Social Work Officer (CSWO). The survey gathered information on the range of activities of CSWOs, the pressures and challenges and how the role was supported locally.
2. Similar to last year, the survey was structured into two parts: part one was shorter and gathered identifiable information about individual CSWOs and their organisations; and part two gathered more in-depth anonymised information focused on the experiences of the CSWO, local structures and professional development. Part 2 allowed CSWOs to respond anonymously, but it meant responses could not be analysed in terms of geography, size or location limiting some of the analysis within part two.
3. Eighteen responses were received from 17 local authorities or partnerships for Part 1 and 22 were received for Part 2. Two-thirds of councils who completed Part 1 represented urban areas and a third represented remote, rural and island areas¹ (see table 1). This is a similar to distribution to the responses for the original survey.

Urban rural classification	Number of local authorities	
Large urban	3	17%
Other urban	8	47%
Accessible small towns	--	5%
Rural small towns	--	--
Accessible rural	2	12%
Remote rural	4	24%
Total	17	100%

4. The remainder of this paper reports on both surveys and the themes explored within the three section:
 - a. Section 1: About CSWO role (survey Part 1)
 - b. Section 2: About CSWO experiences (survey Part 2)
 - c. Section 3: About CSWO professional development (survey Part 2)

¹ Scottish Government's (2018) *Urban Rural Classification* was used as a framework and each Council was classified according to where the greatest proportion of the population resided, but it should be acknowledged that some of its population were living in other communities.

Findings

Section 1 About CSWO role

5. Section one gathered background information of Chief Social Work Officers (CSWOs), their role and some information on their contracts. Eighteen responses were received from 17 local authorities or partnerships for Part 1.

Background information

6. All but two who completed Part 1 of the survey was the designated CSWO. The remaining two individuals were in interim CSWO posts with designated responsibility. From 17 who answered this question, just under half (7) had been in post for more than five years, six between 3-5 years, two for only 1-2 years and two had been in post less than a year. All held at least one post-qualifying award or degree and about two-thirds had completed more than two post-qualifying awards or degrees (see table 2).

Category	Number
PQ1	3
PQ2	3
Practice Teaching Award	8
Mental Health Officer Award	3
Certificate in Child Protection	9
Certificate in Criminal Justice	2
Advanced Award	3
CSWO Postgraduate Diploma	4
Masters level qualification	9
PhD	--

7. Other awards or degrees listed included a Certificate in Community Care, SVQ5 Management, Postgraduate Certificate in Social Work Management, Postgraduate Certificate in Social Services Leadership and Management Postgraduate Diploma in Social Work Management. Three respondents held an additional professional qualification in either child protection, education or business management. One individual was currently completing the CSWO award.

Chief Social Work Officer role

8. From 18 responses, only one CSWOs reported that their position was temporary, all others were in permanent positions. All were employed full-time and contracted to work between 35-37 hours with one individual contracted to work more than 37 hours. CSWOs reported salary levels which varied from £50,000-£59,000 to greater than £100,000, and two-thirds reported that their annual salary was greater than £90,000 compared with 43% of CSWOs in 2021. Of the remaining third: one individual reported their salary was between £50,000-£59,000; one CSWO earned £70,000-£79,000; and four earned between £80,000-£89,000. Of the ten who answered the question on whether this included a supplementary payment, all replied that no supplement was included.

9. Eighty-nine per cent (n=18) reported directly to a Chief Officer, Director, Chief Executive, Executive Director or a combination of roles. The remaining 11% of CSWOs reported to either a Deputy Chief Executive or Head of Service. One CSWO, who currently reported to their Executive Director, would be reporting to the Deputy Executive Director later this year. Forty-four per cent were located within partnerships and the remaining were located within council directorates.
10. As well as covering the role of CSWOs, almost all CSWOs also hold an extensive operational portfolio, usually as a head of service, director or executive chief officer. Two individuals were either a senior manager or assistant chief officers. The key areas within operational portfolios for which CSWOs had all or part responsibility were very similar to those reported in 2021, namely public protection, children's services and criminal justice social work. About half were all or partly responsible for MHO (61%), alcohol and drug services (55%) and adult social work (44%). Other key functions for which CSWO were overall or partly responsible were social work learning and development and quality assurance (see Table 3). CSWOs also reported that out of hours social work, commissioning, safer communities, sexual health services, community learning and development and integrated children's services were within their individual portfolios.

Table 3 Areas within CSWO operational portfolio (n=18)				
Category	All	Partly	None	No response
Quality assurance role only (i.e. No operational responsibilities)	--	--	--	100%
All areas of social work	--	--	--	100%
Children's social work	83%	--	--	17%
Children's health	22%	5%	17%	56%
Education – early years	--	5%	39%	56%
Education – ASN	--	5%	39%	56%
Adult social work	27%	17%	17%	39%
Adult health	5%	11%	28%	56%
Criminal justice social work	78%	--	--	22%
MHO	39%	22%	11%	28%
Quality assurance	28%	39%	--	33%
Public protection	67%	22%	5.5%	5.5%
Alcohol and drug services	33%	22%	17%	28%
Social work learning and development	56%	28%	5%	11%
Homelessness	5.5%	5.5%	33%	56%
Welfare rights/anti-poverty	22%	5%	28%	45%

11. From table 3, it is clear that there were two services for which the majority of CSWOs had full operational responsibility - children's services and criminal justice social work. For all other services, CSWOs reported a mixture of responsibilities; some had full responsibility whereas others had part responsibility.
12. Other colleagues responsible for the professional oversight of statutory social work functions included Heads of Service, General Managers and Chief Officers. In terms of their own management responsibilities, all CSWOs directly line managed between one to ten members of staff ranging from team leader in an operational role, service managers, strategic leads and heads of service.

13. As mentioned the CSWO is located within either partnerships or council directorates and represent a range of structures locally including social work, education and families, education and children’s services, public protection and children’s health, and children’s health and justice services. Similar to 2021, this reflects local arrangements in terms of which services are part of the health and social care partnerships, and how local councils have structured their services for education and social work including criminal justice. It also reflect the complex landscape within which CSWOs operate.

Summary

14. The findings from Survey 1 show that the arrangements and structures locally continue to be challenging for CSWOs to lead the profession across the range of service within their portfolios. Different local arrangements also impact on the range of services for which CSWOs have operational responsibility. The result is that there continue to be multiple remits for CSWOs in relation to their operational responsibility alongside their strategic and professional leadership role across social work. It is likely that this level of complexity is also a feature of those partnerships and councils which did not respond to the survey. One consistent message is that the role of CSWO generally lies with a senior or strategic leader within the organisational structures, which helps to give the profession a voice, but the consistency of this could be at risk of being undermined by the fragmentation of structures across Scotland, variety of local arrangements and multiple remits, lack of full responsibility and consistent budgetary input as well as by the degree of turnover within the role resulting in a loss of knowledge and experience.

Section 2 About your experiences

15. Similar to previous years, the information gathered in this section explored the operational pressures faced by CSWOs and their designated deputies, and how their portfolios might be changing. Data was gathered about organisational role and pressures, CSWO links and connections across local partnerships, involvement with and access to corporate leaders, and several offered reflections on the ongoing impact of responding to Covid-19. Twenty-two responses were received for Part 2.

Organisational role and pressures

16. CSWOs were asked how often they worked additional hours to their contracted weekly hours. From 22 responses, all were working additional hours; all but two replied *always* and the two other respondents replied *sometimes*. Similar to previous years, the amount of additional hours varied across the replies with two CSWOs (9%; n=22) reporting up to an additional ten hours with 91% reporting more than ten additional hours per week.
17. A difference this year, however, compared with 2021 was the proportion doing a greater number of hours. In 2021, just over three-quarters (Social Work Scotland 2021) reported that they worked between 10-20 hours per week in addition to their contracted time, with 16.5% regularly working more than 20 additional hours per week. A year later those working an additional 10-20 hours had reduced to 63.5% because more were working greater than an additional 20 hours (27.5%), which included working weekends:

“20-30 [hours] on average including Sunday.”

(Survey 2022)

“I worked 12 hour days for a year and on Sundays for 4 to 6 hours always working through lunch. I have reduced this in recent times and average 70 hours additional hours per 4 week cycle.”

(Survey 2022)

18. The findings of this survey are beginning to show a trend across three years of CSWOs continuously working additional hours per week and that the number of hours are increasing. It was not possible, however, to determine whether this was related to factors such as the size or geography of a local authority or their response to COVID-19 as no identifiable information was included to ensure confidentiality.
19. CSWOs were then asked to indicate the approximate proportion of time spent across the range of portfolio areas their role covers. Previous surveys had asked individuals to estimate the proportion of their time, but this third survey asked respondents to select an estimate from a range of options (see table 4). There were some comments that it was either too difficult to estimate proportions accurately or to answer the question in the form it was asked. Despite this, however, Table 4 brings together the responses from CSWOs and provides an indication of the services and functions which demand the attention of CSWOs. Those services and activities demanding greatest attention are highlighted in yellow and green respectively.

Category	15% or less	30% or less	45% or less	45-60%	More than 60%	More than 75%	NA/No response
Children's social work and social care including secure accommodation authorisation	18%	32%	27%	4.5%	4.5%	14%	--
Adult social work and social care	18%	41%	27%	14%	--	--	--
Statutory mental health and Adults with Incapacity	86.5%	--	9%	--	--	--	4.5%
Community justice and offender management	59%	23%	9%	--	--	--	9%
Self-directed support implementation	50%	--	--	9%	--	--	41%
IJB related	50%	23%	9%	4.5%	--	--	13.5%
Health related services	36.5%	27%	--	4.5%	--	--	32%
Workforce planning and delivery	77.5%	4.5%	13.5%	--	--	--	4.5%
Workforce learning and development	82%	9%	--	--	4.5%	--	4.5%
Your own learning and development	36.5%	4.5%	--	--	--	--	59%
Clinical and social work/care governance	50%	32%	13.5%	--	--	--	4.5%
Strategic development	32%	36.5%	9%	4.5%	4.5%	4.5%	9%
Involvement in corporate groups	32%	27%	9%	9%	14%	4.5%	4.5%
Involvement in partnership groups	27%	27%	23%	5%	18%	--	--
Budgets	32%	27.5%	9%	13.5%	4.5%	9%	4.5%
Organisational corporate functions	32%	23%	18%	--	4.5%	4.5%	18%
Inspection/audit requirements	36.5%	18%	18%	--	4.5%	--	23%

20. Compared with responses from previous surveys, time was again split across a range of services with adult social work and social care, children's services and community justice taking greater proportion of CSWO time than other services as well as involvement in corporate and partnership groups and functions, strategic development and clinical and social care governance. Two areas that CSWOs reported spending a greater proportion of time compared with previous years was in health related services, and inspection and audit requirements. This may reflect the priorities in relation to health related services as Scotland emerges from the pandemic and that focus has shifted back onto inspection and audit activities. It also continues to demonstrate the wide-range of business for which CSWOs needed to have knowledge and understanding across both service areas and organisational functions:

"I have been in CSWO x2 months in addition to responsibility for children's Community health services, Children's' social work, Justice services including community justice and currently subject to children's joint inspection, with Fostering and adoption inspection recently concluded."

(Survey 2022)

"These are interchangeable throughout this period but the governance around adult social work and care has been more prominent due to the inherent risk caused by the pandemic."

(Survey 2022)

21. CSWOs were also asked to rate areas of organisational pressure or individual stressors on a daily basis on a scale of 1 - 5 across their portfolio areas; 5 being the most pressurised and 1 the least. Table 5 outlines where the proportion of individuals identified organisational pressures and stressors.

Table 5
Organisational pressure or individual stressors on a daily basis 2021 (n=22)

Category	Scales 1-2 (least pressure)	3	Scales 4-5 (greatest pressure)	NA/No response
Children's social work and social care including secure accommodation authorisation	4.5%	13.5%	77.5%	4.5%
Adult social work and social care	13.5%	27.5%	59%	--
Statutory mental health and Adults with Incapacity	45.5%	45.5%	4.5%	4.5%
Community justice and offender management	45.5%	32%	18%	4.5%
Self-directed support implementation	82%	9%	4.5%	4.5%
IJB related	54.5%	9%	23%	13.5%
Health related services	54.5%	32%	9%	4.5%
Workforce planning and delivery	41%	23%	23%	13%
Workforce learning and development	50%	27.5%	13.5%	9%
Your own learning and development	73%	9%	9%	9%
Clinical and social work/care governance	36.5%	27%	36.5%	--
Strategic development	27.5%	18%	45.5%	9%
Involvement in corporate groups	36.5%	27%	23%	13.5%
Involvement in partnership groups	27%	41%	23%	9%
Budgets	18%	23%	50%	9%
Organisational corporate functions	50%	13.5%	23%	13.5%
Inspection/audit requirements	27.5%	41%	18%	13.5%

22. As the table shows, the highest pressures (scales 4 and 5) were felt in relation to children's and adult services, budgeting, clinical and social care governance, strategic development and involvement in corporate and partnership groups. These are the same services and functions identified as causing greatest pressure as previous years, interesting, however, the number of CSWOs reporting high levels of stress across services or functions has increased; for example in 2020, 50% of CSWOs rated the level of stress for delivering children's services at 4 and 5, in 2021 this had risen to 77.5% of CSWOs. The same level of pressure or increased pressure was noted for all the services and functions identified above:

“Both children's and older adult SW provision is extremely challenging at the moment. Children's because of the significant pressure on the system because of vacant posts and adults because of the pressure from so called, delayed discharges.”
(Survey 2022)

“Significant recruitment and retention issues across all social work services. Services are in crisis which requires our concentrated effort. Simultaneous we are required to meet strategic and legislative demands of The Promise, National Child Protection Guidance, ACR, UNCRC etc. Recent ASP inspection meant additional demands on time of already stretched managers and in my view served to exacerbate risk in an already in extremis situation.”

(Survey 2022)

23. As mentioned in the quote above, significant difficulties in recruitment, retention and capacity of the workforce has added considerable pressure alongside budgetary pressures:

“Workforce challenges - recruitment, retention, capacity is a big pressure this year. Budget pressures and demands from the corporate centre is challenging.”

(Survey 2022)

24. Areas of business which a significant number of CSWOs identified as causing less pressure were statutory mental health and adults with incapacity, self-directed support implementation, workforce planning and individual development, and community justice. While the reasons for this could not be determined from this recent survey, it is likely that those identified by CSWOs in previous surveys are relevant today:

“CSWOs described good relationships and support structures in place that helped manage the pressures, while others noted these activities demanded the time of CSWO but it was not causing additional stress. However, in terms of both workforce and individual, professional development, the reason for there being less pressure was the limited opportunity to undertake activity in these areas; the absence of dedicated budgets, time and capacity meant that such areas, while critical, were not able to be prioritised.”

[Social Work Scotland 2021, p.10)

Links and connections across partnerships

25. The wide-ranging corporate and partnership functions and groups that CSWOs were involved with was considered in detail through the survey. CSWOs were asked about the range of corporate groups, partnerships or meetings that they attend or chair. CSWOs reported attending or being a member of a range of strategic and senior management groups and partnerships with a range of titles reflecting local arrangements and structures. This raises the question about whether CSWOs feel spread too thinly across a range of activities and, therefore, unable to provide a meaningful contribution in all areas of business.
26. Strategic multi-agency groups included Community Planning Groups, Community Justice Partnerships, Integrated Joint Boards (IJBs), Clinical Care Governance groups, Public Protection Chief Officers Groups, Public Protection Committees, Adult Protection Committees (APC), Child Protection Committees (CPC) and MAPPA. Senior management groups including Corporate Management Team, Strategic Resource Groups for the partnership, Children's Service Management team and Improvement and Performance Groups.

Other wider partnerships and networks included Anti-Poverty Groups, Migrant and Resettlement Strategic Groups, Mental Health Leads Network and Violence Against Women. CSWOs also attend relevant council committees when appropriate.

27. CSWOs listed an average of 15-20 meetings that they attend on a regular basis with a mixture of chairing, co-chairing or attending as a member. CSWOs also reported chairing a range of subgroups for APCs, CPCs, and IJBs such as SCR and audit and performance. Almost all had a minute-taker for some or most meetings they chaired, but not all. While this support was welcomed, one respondent reflected:

"I have admin support for all the meetings I chair, but no project management capacity for the follow through on the actions and improvements."

(Survey 2021)

28. There was a similarity in the strategic multi-agency committees, boards or groups that CSWOs reported into on a regular basis such as local IJBs, CPPs, HSCPs, Chief Officer Groups, Child, Adult or Public Protection Committees. Most had been quarterly meetings, but some had increased to monthly or even fortnightly during the pandemic. Senior management groups providing oversight for services were now either weekly or fortnightly. The cabinet and local council committees that CSWOs attended regularly included full council, finance, audit and scrutiny committees, and committees for education, social work, and children and young people. The frequency of council meetings ranged from a quarter to six weeks.

Involvement with and access to corporate leaders

29. From 22 survey responses, 68% replied that they were a member of their authority's most senior corporate management team. The remaining CSWOs described being members of the HSCP management team or executive team, or COG (Public Protection) or reporting to their Head of Service. For over half (59%) the operational portfolio was the same as when they took on the role of CSWO, but the role had changed for others. One change noted last year had been the extension of the CSWO role to include oversight of care homes in response to COVID-19. This had continued in 2021. For other CSWOs, the original CSWO function had expanded to include services reflecting local structures such as out of hours services, children and families, and older adult social work services both strategically and operationally, and homeless services.
30. When asked about the extent of their involvement in budget setting, 43% of CSWOs (n=21) reported being fully involved in budget setting processes, 38% replied there were the remaining 19% reported little or no involvement. Those involved in budget setting is slightly less than in previous years where half reported being involved in setting budgets (Social work Scotland 2021). The following summarise the different levels of involvement:

"I am not involved and for years have challenged this to be advised that it is for the Chief Officer to make these decisions."

[Survey 2021]

"As head of children's service, more involved in budget setting for this particular service. Not really involved in the HSCP budget setting or wider council budget setting."

[Survey 2021]

"Fully involved in budget setting for the partnership."

[Survey 2021]

31. As set out in Scottish Government (2016) guidance, CSWOs should have direct access to the council Chief Executive and elected members, and be a statutory member of the area's Integration Joint Board. Overwhelmingly, 91% (n=22) replied they had direct access to the Chief Executive of the Council and to Chief Integration Officers, but there was reflection that sessions were often cancelled or that they needed to be more structured to allow for a stronger voice in representing social work. One individual replied they had access 'in principle'.
32. Over four-fifths (86.5%) had direct access to Council Leaders and elected members and the main reason given by others for lack of access to leaders and members was no clear mechanism or process and, while a CSWO could request meetings when required, it was expected that this link was through Chief Officers. Similar reasons were given about lack of access to the Chair of the IJB, however, for one CSWO there was no IJB as they remained the lead agency.

Table 6 Direct access to corporate leaders (n=22)			
Category	Yes	No	No response
Direct access to the Chief Executive of the Council	91%	4.5%	4.5%
Direct access to the Leader of the Council and elected members	86.5%	9%	4.5%
Direct access to the Chair of the Integration Joint Board	77.5%	18%	4.5%
Direct access to the Integration Chief Officer	95.5%	--	4.5%

33. Almost two-thirds (62%; n=21) reported there was dedicated strategy and performance support for social work in their area. Of those with a dedicated service, about half shared this with the HSCP or Education directorate. There were mixed views about whether this provision locally was adequate. About half were positive about the support: 'Yes, a good invaluable resource' whereas for some there was some support for performance, but not strategy and the support was shared across other Council departments. Others thought more support was needed, as these comments reflect:

"Not enough for the huge demand for this, I have one Programme Manager dedicated to Children and Families or Justice. There is a centralised PMO team and requests."
(Survey 2021)

"No - we have a performance and planning team with support from this team. However it is not aligned to service area as such particular areas dominate the pull from this team."
(Survey 2021)

34. For those without dedicated strategy and performance support, this was because the function sat within another directorate such as education or the function had been dismantled the implementation of the Integrated Joint Board.
35. CSWOs were asked if there was a dedicated learning and development function or team for social work in their area. From 21 responses, 43% reported that their organisation did have a dedicated function or team. The remaining 57% replied there was no dedicated function or team. Learning and development was part of a wider corporate function and the demands of health were often a priority or had needed to be absorbed into an already depleted learning and development resource.

36. A third of respondents thought the provision was adequate, but an equal number thought the provision locally was not adequate partly due to sustained cuts across several years. The remaining third replied that provision was either being developed or there were increasing difficulties in protecting the training team:

“The Professional Social Work Training Team is valued by the service but has been difficult to protect in the same way as front line services have been. The team is now around a third of the size it was when the council was established.”

(Survey 2021)

37. In terms of access to administrative or PA support more generally, all 21 CSWOs who replied had shared (29%) or dedicated (71%) support. For those who had access to shared support, this was still limited:

“Shared with another 5 Directors and chair of ICSG and CP Board - very limited administrative support.”

(Survey 2021)

Summary

38. The summary in the CSWO report last year (Social Work Scotland 2021) remains relevant a year later. CSWOs continue to work additional hours. More are working a greater number of additional hours as well as reflecting on higher levels of pressure across a wide range of services and functions, particularly in relation to children’s and adult services, budgeting and the need to be visible on a wide-range of partnership meetings and groups. The role of the CSWO across Scotland is highly variable including direct access to, and membership of, senior strategic corporate management teams and multi-agency partnerships and involvement in budget setting. Membership, however, was often through their role as Head of Service or senior operational management rather than as the CSWO. Whilst the majority relied they had direct access to senior leaders, there was a need for some to formalise this access to allow for a stronger voice in representing social work.
39. The lack of dedicated strategy and performance support in many areas or a dedicated learning and development function for social work, means it is more difficult for social work as a profession to grow and develop, and may impact on recruitment and retention. The priorities of other directorates or services in some areas appear to have greater prominence. The range of activities and pressures on the CSWO role and responsibility for providing strategic and professional leadership continues to grow, but perhaps attention should be given to the questions of how long this can be sustained.

Section 3 About your professional development

40. The information gathered in this final section explored CSWOs’ own support networks, learning and professional development, and promoting social work.

CSWOs’ own support networks

41. CSWOs were asked to record what support they had accessed or planned to access during the past year. The three key areas of support accessed were formal 1:1 supervision, peer support and membership of professional organisations. Fewer used mentoring or job shadowing (see table 7). The picture this year is similar situation to previous years.

Category	Used	Intend to use	No response
Formal 1-1 line manager supervision	82%	--	18%
Peer support	86.5%	--	13.5%
Mentoring	4.5%	13.5%	82%
Job shadowing	--	13.5%	86.5%
Membership of professional organisations	73%	--	27%

42. The survey asked more specific questions about the use of peer support networks and, in particular, to rate from 1 (least) to 5 (most) on how likely they were to use peer support networks. From 19 responses, just about three-quarters (74%) rated the likeliness of using networks as either 4 or 5, which was a similar response to last year. Similar to previous years, CSWOs commented on the unique, but often isolated role of the CSWO in their answers to this question. Peer support networks were considered important both locally and nationally, particularly if a CSWO's line manager was from a different background such as health or education. As two CSWOs reflected:

"...peers are often best placed to understand the pressures, strains and most importantly the "cultural" challenges."

[Survey 2021]

"I have found that at times being CSWO is an isolated position. As such it helps to be able to reach out to peers for reflective discussions and examination of mutual interests."

[Survey 2021]

43. An interesting development not reported in previous years was the emergence in one or two areas of local regular meetings of two or three neighbouring CSWOs. This provided an opportunity for exploring emerging operational issues and peer support. Those CSWOs talked of trusted relationships as one element key to the success of their neighbour support networks. This may have been in response to the increasingly virtual environment within which colleagues have been working. Several CSWOs commented that good relationships and trust were needed for effective peer support networks, but there have been limited opportunities to build this during the pandemic:

"I think in order to utilise peer support you need to be able to trust and have knowledge of the person, this hasn't been as easy during lockdowns and virtual meetings, which do not allow the same interactions. I would want face to face meetings with any peer if possible."

(Survey 2021)

44. One final reflection was that while peer support networks were through highly valuable, it was sometimes difficult to get a clear position as the role and responsibility of CSWOs was so varied. Another reflected that turning to their peers for support and advice was *"only in exceptional circumstances"* as they were conscious of the demands on colleagues. One CSWO asked for a formalisation of a peer support network.

Learning and professional development

45. About a third of CSWO coming into the post received an induction. For some, this was a clearly set out programme, but for others it was a series of 1:1 meetings with key individuals in the organisation. Some had stepped up to the role in an interim capacity and some had taken on the role in critical circumstances, which had made the delivery of an induction programme difficult to achieve. It was suggested that Social Work Scotland could perhaps develop this further as a support to councils and CSWOs
46. Once in post, 50% of CSWOs (n=22) reported that their learning needs were self-identified and for a few this was through regular supervision and their annual appraisal although this was described by one CSWO as *“a bit hit and miss”* or appraisals which sometimes lack an *“understanding of the professional role, function and duties.”*
47. CSWOs were also asked whether they had made use or planned to make use of qualifications or courses in their role. From the few responses provided, the main qualifications or courses which CSWOs had used or planned to use learning in practice were: the PGDip CSWO; a Professional Masters Programme; Leadership for Integration, Programme Uplift and TURAS. In the last year, the main supports and resources CSWOs (n=22) which informed their practice was their own reading of professional articles, books, blogs (77%) supported by their own independent research (68%), conferences and seminars (64%) and to a lesser extent accessing the resources of Social Services Knowledge Scotland (36%). Fewer CSWOs reported learning through conferences and seminars, which is probably a reflection of the past two years. Another key area for informing practice was engaging with people who use services (68%).
48. When asked about gaps in learning or what would support learning, CSWOs commented that time, capacity and, to a lesser extent, budgets were the main constraints in accessing learning and development as these heartfelt comments illustrate:

“Time demands, Job is hugely demanding. Big risk is exhaustion.”

(Survey 2021)

“I have insufficient capacity to get through the essential day to day aspects of my job and time is a fundamental problem in my accessing learning, development or leadership support.”

(Survey 2021)

49. Newer CSWOs welcomed the session provided by Social Work Scotland for new CSWOs and other enablers identified included Social Work Scotland’s CSWO forum, which was thought invaluable:

“...my participation in SWS has been the single most helpful provision in recent years.”

(Survey 2021)

50. Online and virtual training and seminars, supportive management, personal commitment and dedicated social work learning and development service all supported continuous professional development. A couple of CSWOs suggested that a buddy approach for CSWOs would be helpful as

well as opportunities to shadow. One CSWO reflected that it would be helpful to have experiential learning as part of the taught element of the CSWO Postgraduate course.

51. CSWOs were asked about their knowledge gaps on entry into their current role and to identify current gaps in their knowledge. The main knowledge gaps on entry into their role were related to services in relation to mental health, adults with incapacity, MAPPA and offender management including management of Supervised Release Orders. In terms of the work of the council or partnership, the main knowledge gaps were around the work of the IJB and clinical health and social care governance.
52. The range of services and functions identified as urgent or critical gaps in knowledge when CSWOs came into post is likely to reflect their own backgrounds, knowledge and experience. Those from an adult social work background often identified statutory children's social work including secure care for young people and, not unexpectedly, those from a children's social work background identified adult social work, older people and care homes. Both identified understanding the responsibility for Children's Health, which includes Health Visiting, School Nursing, CAMHS and speech and language therapy, as critical gaps on taking up their role.
53. Other gaps identified also related to understanding the organisation; its structure, history and development, and understanding the political environment. Of the few, who recorded current gaps in their knowledge, there was acknowledgment that:

"...although I have not ticked all the boxes there will still be learning in these areas."

(Survey 2021)

54. For those few who identified current gaps, the main area was their knowledge of mental health and, in particular, the Mental Health (Care and Treatment) (Scotland) Act 2003. Other areas of knowledge identified by CSWOs that could be improved were:

- duties in relation to the CSWO role;
- consistent understanding on how the "line of sight" function is discharged;
- anticipating the impact, consequences and opportunities of the NCS proposals; and
- commissioning.

Promotion of social work identity

55. CSWOs were asked about their positive experiences of maintaining professional oversight and upholding the values of social work. A small minority felt confident in maintaining social work values and key to this was investing in partnership working to develop good working relationships and an understanding of the CSWO role across the partnership as well as good social work governance structures:

"...although delivering statutory functions is challenging at times I find investing in partnership working is essential and a good way of sharing values and goals."

(Survey 2021)

"I have no issues maintaining and promoting social work values. The CSWO role is well understood across senior managers in the partnership as well as the council and respect the role. Managing change for services whether health or social work is the biggest challenge. Good social work governance structures and senior social work management positions essential in maintaining this."

(Survey 2021)

56. A smaller number of CSWOs commented that it had been a challenge initially. Over time, however, this had become clearer and easier through engagement with colleagues across the partnership. For half of CSWOs, however, this continued to be a constant challenge. For some, complex structural arrangements and the priority given to health services locally meant it was challenging to maintain social work's professional identity and voice within the integrated environment. This had been further impacted by the lack of face to face interaction during the pandemic. In some areas this lack of visibility was compounded by a lack of social work visibility within local authority committee structures. Visibility of social work was dependent on social workers in leadership positions as well as the voice of social work at all levels within the organisation:

"Doing this effectively depends on having positive professional relationships with key leaders, organisational structures and the level of seniority of qualified social work managers across all areas of practice."

(Survey 2021)

57. This reflects that challenges identified in previous years particularly, working in a landscape which was both integrated and separate as not all social work services were within a single partnership. Making sure social work had a voice within health dominated and older people's agendas and the lack of a specific social work committees within local government structures was challenging.

Wider context

Working in the context of a pandemic

58. CSWOs reflected that working during a pandemic had increased the demands on the CSWO role. Some highlighted that aspects of their role had clarified and resulted in positive close multiagency working relationships. The role was more prominent and respected locally and had helped to keep the focus on public protection, and health and care standards at the fore.
59. The increase in the demands on CSWOs and hours worked, however, required energy and time which was difficult to sustain both for themselves and exhausted operational and management teams. For other CSWOs, the responses to the pandemic were felt to have magnified the lack of understanding of the role and fragmentation of the professional accountabilities and duties. Those who had taken on the CSWO role during the pandemic spoke of *"a steep learning curve"*, which some commented had challenged their values and ways of thinking although it was unclear in what way. Some commented on a local disaggregation of the responsibilities for social care from social work with little understanding of their mutual dependence. Consequently, some social work professionals felt they had not been able to influence corporate and national discussions to the same extent.

60. In a departure from previous CSWO annual surveys, Social Work Scotland asked for views on the areas CSWOs would most like to contribute to influence the development of the National Care Service, identify areas not listed within the survey options and whether they had concerns about being able to contribute. From 22 CSWOs, the areas they would most like to contribute to were workforce (64%), governance and structure (55%), pathways and partnership arrangements (45%), regulations and assurance (45%), and data and insight (32%). The areas few replied they would like to contribute to were finance, and digital and technology.
61. Two key issues were raised about having the capacity to contribute and, unsurprisingly, those were time and capacity, and the infrastructure. Thought was perhaps needed about how the voice and views of CSWOs in relation to the National Care Service could be most effectively conveyed and the role of Social Work Scotland in facilitating this:

“The challenge of CSWO responsibilities and Head of Service demand across children’s health social work and justice is extensive.”

(Survey 2021)

“I am interested in participating in the work streams but I do not have the infrastructure in my service to support me in order for me to take on additional work. All CSWOs are busy and I am very grateful for those who represent us. Capacity needs to be addressed and perhaps a full time rep is needed for the NCS. It should have its own CSWO! “

(Survey 2021)

“I have limited capacity to support additional groups without standing down other functions as do my colleagues in service management. It would be helpful for SWS / OCSWA to emphasise the importance of our engagement to chief officers and CWOs.”

(Survey 2021)

CSWOs’ final reflections

62. CSWO’s final reflection illustrate the tensions and challenges as well as the rewards associated with the role. The role has expanded, is demanding and highly complex. There is a constant need to balance budgets with significant savings and deliver safe services in line with professional values. Others also mentioned the impact of inspections and challenges of working in rural and island contexts. CSWOs are required to keep updated practice, policy and legislative developments. Some feel there remains an assumption that CSWOs and services can continue to consume additional tasks, but parity is needed with other roles, such as Nursing Directors, particularly in the context of social care governance. Some also felt that the role and value of the CSWO was diluted due to extensive and, at times, conflicting responsibilities as Head of Service.

63. Despite these challenges, there were rewards:

“Despite all of the challenge and stress of the last year, undertaking the CSWO role is still the best job in world! C-19 has in my opinion, put all of the responsibilities of the CSWO into sharp focus. The importance of the effective, positive working relationships has come to the fore in order to manage the challenges of workload and

the responsibilities. Partnership working in my area has strengthened and we have shared to anxieties and the pressures and the frustrations together. SWS weekly meetings have been hugely valuable, so thank you."

(Survey 2021)

Summary

64. In terms of the support available to CSWOs, this had been more challenging during a period when the requirements placed on CSWOs have been considerable in terms of responding to the continuing crisis of the pandemic, current operational responsibilities, and the strategic and professional leadership role. Peer support networks built on trusting relationships are an important source of advice and support, and help address feelings of isolation in the role; all essential to wellbeing. The restrictions, however, of working within the pandemic has meant fewer opportunities for face to face contact and fewer opportunities to build those necessary relationships.
65. It was interesting to note that some CSWOs had formed local neighbouring networks, although others were acutely aware of seeking advice from colleagues already managing complex workloads. Setting up local arrangements for peer support alongside national arrangements, which were facilitated and supported by Social Work Scotland, might be worth considering in developing the support available to CSWOs. This may also help develop confidence and address local and national challenges in promoting social work's identity, which is likely to be increasingly important in light of national developments such as the National Care Service.
66. The gaps in the knowledge of CSWOs when taking up the role were both in terms of services and also the function of the role within the structures of the organisation. Many had developed a greater understanding of services and the organisation while in the role. CSWOs had little additional time and capacity for their own personal and professional development, but recognised its importance and often undertook their own reading and research to keep informed of developments. CSWOs also recognised the importance of being informed of key national developments across the profession and, in light of the need to manage current and competing demands, reflected there was a need to coordinate a collective response supported by Social Work Scotland.

Final reflections

67. Data has now been gathered across three years and CSWOs commitment to the role is evident throughout. As discussed, the role of the CSWO as set out in guidance is clear; namely to provide strategic and professional leadership in the delivery of social work services and to assist local authorities, Health and Social Care Partnerships and partners in understanding the complexities and cross-cutting nature of social work service delivery. The diversity, however, of local organisational structures and often complex arrangements and competing priorities for the delivery of services has meant in practice that the role is hugely variable and increasingly demanding.
68. There is broad understanding of what the role involves, but there appears less clarity about what the role does not involve. The result may be that as challenges and pressures continue in local partnerships and authorities, then CSWOs will continue to absorb additional responsibilities and tasks. It is perhaps time to consider where the boundaries are for CSWOs.

References

Scottish Government (2016) *The Role of Chief Social Work Officer. Guidance Issued by Scottish Ministers pursuant to Section 5(1) of the Social Work (Scotland) Act 1968*. Edinburgh: Scottish Government.

Social Work Scotland (2020) *CSWO Survey – initial results*.