



## What needs to change to support social work in Scotland

### 1. The purpose of social work

1.1. This is for social workers. It sets out what a social worker needs right now to support society (an individual, family or community). Social workers need capacity and resources to ensure that people who require social work right now and in the future are not excluded. Social work is, at its core, rooted in upholding human rights and social justice. This is what makes us distinct from other professions, working together in a complex system.

1.2. Our first and foremost aim is to help ensure people are healthy and wherever possible, at home with their families and supportive networks. We must work to ensure that everyone we support lives in an environment where to love someone and to be loved by someone, is a genuine opportunity.

1.3. Social work must be person centred, built around people's unique strengths, hopes and aspirations and works with people to support and facilitate change rather than 'doing to'.

1.4. That also means that social work isn't a task-based profession; we must make decisions on what to do based on our skills, knowledge, and risk analysis, and use them to inform the situation we're working in. We must aim to be proactive rather than reactive.

1.5. Social workers recognise the wider political context for many individuals and families we work with, and we must be unafraid to challenge the structures and systems behind this. Social work exists to challenge or mitigate structural inequalities and poverty; social work supports individuals and communities to navigate wider socio-economic issues.

1.6. We must be educated and motivated in the politics around us. We should tackle social injustice with every conversation, every assessment, every support plan, and every case note we write.

1.7. In upholding rights for all citizens, we must be able to recognise and challenge discrimination in all its forms and be anti-discriminatory and anti-racist in all our practice. Racism and discrimination experienced by anyone is harmful, both to individuals and to the profession, and social work seeks to confront and oppose racism and discrimination.

1.8. Social workers should be involved in supporting communities to develop their assets and strengths. Being familiar with the community, standing in solidarity with

the people they support. Forming relationships based on trust where people feel comfortable to share their life experiences.

1.9. Social workers should work as part of the fabric of our communities, providing positive interventions and support that means that where possible, statutory involvement becomes unnecessary.

1.10. Social workers hold a unique role in a multi-disciplinary, integrated environment, respected by other professions who work alongside us. We are experts in legal literacy, awareness, advocacy, rights, and advice – both for the organisations we represent and the people we work in partnership with.

## **2. How we work**

2.1. As social workers our most important resource is ourselves. This means we must use our skills and knowledge to build trust and use strong relationships to facilitate change, and we must be critically reflective of our reasoning and our practice. We must be clearly / openly supported to do this by our managers and organisations.

2.2. We're aware of the legal duties, powers and assessments we sometimes need to make, and the effect they can have on people's lives. Therefore, we must practice in an ethical way, using social work values to ensure that we are compassionate, kind, non-judgmental and honest.

2.3. Social workers must be confident practitioners who are empowered to challenge those who hold power (duty-bearers) when people's rights are at risk of being infringed.

2.4. We must have balanced caseloads and time to enable us to focus on early intervention and prevention as well as statutory involvement in people's lives.

2.5. Social workers have key strengths in terms of understanding risk. Our knowledge base and advanced application of risk goes beyond a notion of risk assessments and risk mitigation. Our most critical social work thinking, reasoning and educated approach is where there is risk involved for people and particularly where people who have the capacity to do so are making decisions that expose them to risk.

2.6. As skilled professionals, with specialist knowledge of social and psychological interventions and legislation, social workers have a role with other professionals to support rights-based practice and to ensure that the decisions we make with, and on behalf of the people we work with, meet their needs and best interests.

2.7. Social work must have a holistic approach which sees someone in the context of their lives. We must be a collective, consistent, and cohesive profession, whether

or not we are specialised in working with children and families, adults or in Justice social work.

### **3. Leading and supporting social work**

3.1. Social workers must be supported by leaders who share their values and approaches, and there must be clear and varied career paths for social workers to develop as leaders, including within practice.

3.2. Our leaders should also be social workers, who can provide skilled supervision, that promotes reflective and supportive practice. Together they must be able to hold risk and fully understand the principles of positive risk-taking.

3.3. There must be transparency in relation to decision making and policy implementation so social workers feel included, not excluded, in development and delivery.

3.4. Social work leaders are vital in establishing better (creative, innovative, co-produced) approaches, better systems, an environment for rights-based practice and setting the culture, granting the permissions, and enabling social work to be rooted in ethical reasoning.

3.5. Social work leaders must have access to support and time to understand the complex systems they work in and to understand their influence and role in it.

3.6. Social work leaders must be able to use our social work values in senior roles with authority, so that they can articulate and embed the values of social work in the way that teams, services, and departments work. They must work closely with other professions and organisations within a culture of mutual respect.

3.7. Social work leaders must have the autonomy, capacity, and skills to ensure that cultures do not facilitate (or model) overwork, stress and burnout. They must create and model cultures that promote healthy work life balance and ensure that social workers have manageable and balanced caseloads.

3.8. Social work leaders must ensure that social workers have access to good and relevant support and regular professional supervision to help with critical reflection.

3.9. Social workers and social work leaders must be able to access training and support which is tailored to the professional needs of the workforce. Social work leaders must create a culture where professional development is prioritised and valued by the wider workforce – creating capacity to lead by example.

3.10. Social work leaders should understand what motivates and supports their workforce to stay, and what attracts people into the profession. They must create the conditions to nurture the workforce, develop a learning culture, and create pride in the profession.

3.11. Social work leaders must understand their local context within the national picture and have access to the right data and insights to inform decision making. There must be clear and streamlined reporting mechanisms for this purpose. They must be able to provide feedback and influence how this works.

3.12. Social work leaders hold a crucial role in the implementation of complex social policy. They pave the way for the frontline social work workforce to do their jobs well. Social work leaders must have capacity to create learning organisations, where supported people and carers lived experience is recognised and they are included as leaders.

3.13. Social work leaders need to have the time and space to work collaboratively to focus on finding solutions to adaptive problems and to hold our own with other professions.