

# Annual Report

## 2023-24

### Introduction

Welcome to a short(ish) overview of Social Work Scotland's output and work during 2023-24. If you couldn't make it to our AGM, or even if you're not a member and you're interested in the work we're doing - this report is for you. If you have any questions and would like to talk to us about any of the work featured in this report, please contact us: [admin@socialworkscotland.org](mailto:admin@socialworkscotland.org).

Social Work Scotland is a membership organisation, providing supportive networks, representation and development for managers and leaders in social work, across the profession. We also have a distinct function to support the 32 Chief Social Work Officers in Scotland, and we work closely with other organisations who seek to support the profession across Scotland, the wider UK and internationally. These include the Scottish Government, the Scottish Association of Social Workers (SASW), COSLA and unions, Universities, as well as institutions like Iriss, CELCIS, CYCJ and others.

Social Work in Scotland continues to face challenges in meeting increasing demand for services at a time when budgets are under pressure through cuts in public expenditure. Building and maintaining a robust, confident social work workforce is a key priority in responding to identified challenges. Social work, in common with other public services, also faces major difficulties in recruitment and retention, particularly of qualified and experienced social workers. What has remained consistent throughout all of this during the year is the unfailing input of our members, and their interest, passion, and commitment to the profession and its support and development.

Looking ahead, we expect big changes for Social Work Scotland as we develop a partnership around National Social Work structures, and the impact that that will have on our members, local government, the third sector and all the associated professions we work with.

## A year in numbers

- 4 Standing Committees
  - 24 subgroups
- 2 new subgroups coming soon
- 190 individual members
- 27 consultation responses
- 10 reports and outputs
- 3 hosted conferences
- 268 annual conference delegates

## Policy and practice overview

The Policy and Practice Leads and Advisors, along with our hosted projects, work hard within their respective area of expertise. Engaging in an ever-changing policy landscape, they negotiate with local and national Government partners to balance the drive to deliver thoughtful and well-intentioned policy directives within the complex implementation landscape. Always with a mind to how policy can be delivered in a way that is meaningful and right, for people who access, and people who design and deliver social work support.

Across the policy and practice space, key issues of workforce capacity, partnership approaches, and policy implementation are critical. Whether in the context of delivering The Promise, the implementation of Self-Directed Support, digital transformation in Justice, or responding to Scottish Government's National Care Service proposals, Policy & Practice Leads and Advisors, and Project Teams purposefully profile the thoughts, view and feelings of the members of our Committees and subgroups.

The BASW Code of Ethics are the guiding principles behind all of the work in the policy and practice space, we use these principles every day as our foundation for engaging with partners, and in keeping true to our purpose as set out in our Articles of Association.

## Adults Standing Committee

### Background

The Adults Standing Committee meets regularly and is chaired by Diane Fraser. We welcomed Neil Gibson in August 2024 to take over the role of Adults Policy and Practice Lead, supporting the Standing Committee. Drafting of the Committee workplan was completed in Feb 2024, with the strategic priorities agreed as:

- Promote the unique role, value and contribution of social work and social care;
- Champion research and evidence informed approaches in our work; Support and encourage workforce development (with a focus on celebrating success, promoting standards, achieving practice improvement, and demonstrating continuous learning);
- Influence and shape policy and legislation relating to social work and social care;
- Provide professional leadership and increase leadership capacity across social work and social care; and,
- Recognise the value of continuous improvement through self-evaluation and performance improvement action.

The Adults Standing Committee has 7 subgroups which report into it, including a newly formed group around Substance Use.

### **Highlighted Activity**

Members of the Adults Standing Committee are active within the membership of the Collaborative Response and Assurance Group (CRAG) looking at **Winter Planning**, and associated subgroups to work with SG and system leaders from across health, social care and social work to identify and support improvements across performance and practice around pressures on acute medical settings.

Work continues in respect of future funding to support capacity, as well as exploring issues around policing and mental health in our **MHO subgroup**, alongside identifying issues and solutions around training and development of current and future MHO's, linked to staff retention, and considering how the Advanced Practice Framework may assist.

Our **LD and Autism subgroup** continue to engage around the Coming Home policy, Day Service Review and Modernisation, and developments with the LDAN (Learning Disability, Autism, and Neurodiversity Bill).

Members of the **Older People's subgroup** are exploring GIRFE and the emerging learning from the pathfinder areas, as well as understanding the problems facing current care at home arrangements across Scotland with a particular focus on unmet need, training, and the interaction with regulation and legislation.

**Social Work Scotland's hosted SDS Project team** continues to develop the seven thematic workstreams and has also launched three significant resources. This year, as well as hosting quarterly half day Community of Practice events and regular topic-based seminars, the SDS Project have worked in partnership with three local areas to deliver a roadshow in each area focusing on using the SDS standards and guidance, and kickstarting local development.

We've shaped discussions around the minimum dataset, which has now been published by Iriss, and members of our **Adult Support and Protection subgroup** are involved in an ongoing discussion around amendments to section 5 – duty to cooperate for relevant health professionals, and related charging for report writing and meeting attendance in some areas in Scotland from medical professionals.

We're also connecting with COSLA and Penumbra in relation to their work on the self-harm strategy and action plan 2023-27.

### **Proposed Future Actions**

- Focus on the future of long-term care for older people, funding, and awareness raising about the challenges faced.
- Contribute to work which focuses on increasing accessibility of ILF.
- Strengthen links with research and evidence informed practice across adult social work.
- Contribute to the development of the LDAN (Learning Disability, Autism, and Neurodiversity Bill).
- Ongoing consideration of the positional power of social work in the integrated structure.
- Consider issues around the charging for reports by medical professionals, particularly in MHO and ASP domains.
- Embed focus on Mental Health within subgroups, with a particular focus on Community Mental Health services within the MHO subgroup.

## **Children and Families Standing Committee**

### **Background**

Our Children and Families Standing Committee meets regularly. The intensity of the agenda for children, noted in the 2023 AGM report, has further increased. This is driven by a complex political context, and has meant busy and demanding committee agendas, and additional focused sessions on specific significant areas.

Our Children and Families Standing Committee is supported by six subgroups. A further subgroup focusing on disability and mental health will start in 2025.

Much of our work is linked to the Promise and related developments, consultations, and implementation. While supportive of the aims, capacity to respond to the level of demand is stretched, and the sector has reached saturation point in relation to absorbing expectations and the amount of change particularly in a context of workforce and financial pressure. We are increasingly emphasising the importance of the pillars of workforce and implementation as fundamentals, alongside the need to pause and consider what is required and the sequencing and time needed to achieve the desired outcome for children and those who work with them.

Our outgoing chair Joan Tranent retired for a well-earned rest in October, and we're delighted that Stephen Morgan has taken over the role. Alongside two new Vice Chairs to aid future sustainability, we are also identifying individuals who have specific knowledge or expertise and who are willing to take on specific pieces of work on behalf of committee, formalising something which was already beginning to happen.

A development session is being planned for early in 2025 to agree both our priorities, and areas we may choose not to progress.

### **Highlighted Activity**

Some of the major areas of work this year have included;

- Youth justice (both the Children's Care and Justice Act and Reimagining secure care work),
- Children's hearing reform,
- Ongoing work relating to Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry
- UNCRC Incorporation Act and implications.
- Bairns Hoose, ongoing developmental and learning around the SCIM and inclusion of IRD training, and review of Age of Criminal Responsibility
- Mental health and children
- Various reviews and improvement work related to specific care settings eg kinship care, future of foster care, restraint in residential care, supported accommodation
- Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and related work e.g. age assessments, placement capacity, skill base, links to trafficking and exploitation.
- Increasingly, the impact of the changing face of care.
- Policy, legislative and improvement work across the sector, including children's hearing reform, NCS/Children's Services Reform, inspection and workforce related matters.

Additionally, we were asked to undertake **consultancy work with Moldova** as part of the transformation programme for childcare, preparing to move children from institutions to family-based care. This involved preparing material for training staff and carers, and delivery of a training trainers' course.

Our **JII team presented a well received workshop of the Scottish Child Interview Model** and implementation at the European Social Services Conference in Antwerp

We're increasing connections across the domestic abuse agenda, including evidence at Council of Europe - Istanbul Convention on VAWG visit to Scotland

We continue to be involved in the safeguarding work linked to our Ukrainian guests, and linked to this work around **culture and knowledge as our population and care population is increasingly marked by ethnic diversity**

We have **published work about access to records**, which will lead to development of a document on best practice, and our **Reviewing Officers Subgroup have produced a handbook for best reviewing practice**.

### **Proposed Future Actions**

We'll focus on what's desirable and achievable over 2025 as we navigate the anticipated Promise Bill. This is alongside existing legislating and improvement and change which is sought but considered achievable without legislation. We aim to be the voice of reason, facilitating consideration of how to achieve the desired change and pointing to the foundations necessary to make this happen before the more visible aspects of the 'building' are progressed.

## **Justice Standing Committee**

### **Background**

The Justice Standing Committee (JSC) meets every 8 weeks and is well attended by Justice Social Work (JSW) managers and other partners. This year, the revised format and structure of the committee has helped focus on a more strategic agenda, supported by the Chair, Vice Chair and

Members. This has included identifying standing items and other issues which link directly to the Scottish Government (SG) Justice Vision, Community Justice Strategy and Delivery Plan. Our five sub-groups report into the JSC with relevant strategic issues, while also addressing operations and effective practice.

There are a number of cross-cutting issues which are shared across the work of the groups, including areas such as youth justice, lived experience, substance use and mental health.

The changes to the structure of our committee have further enhanced the profile of JSW with our partners and helped enhance leadership across the membership. Planning for change in membership is in place as experienced members retire and support is available for new members who join the committee. The Chair's term is also due to end in December 2024.

## Highlighted Activity

**Prison Population:** This has required a whole-systems, collaborative approach, to understand the reasons behind overcrowding in prison and the changing nature of the prison population. SG and Scottish Prison Service (SPS) specifically asked that Social Work Scotland be involved in the Criminal Justice Board and other strategic meetings in order help find solutions, and committee members have been well placed to contribute to the various facets of the discussion. We worked with SPS and SG on the emergency early release arrangements also over the summer.

**Public Protection:** Engagement with SG, CSWOs, SOLACE and SOLAR have been central to the progression of the discussion around MAPPA in Scotland. Other developments have included testing of internet offending programmes, serious and organised crime discussions and how best to work with an ageing cohort of individuals who present with risks to the community but also have social care needs.

**Funding issues-** We provided both written and oral evidence to the Parliamentary Criminal Justice Committee as part of their pre-budget scrutiny process. We're also working with SG on a revised funding formula, to aid distribution of the budget in a fair and equitable way.

**Inspection:** Publication of Prison-Based Social Work Thematic Review on 4/4/24 and HMIPS Progression report published on 14/6/24, with a number of recommendations being considered and an improvement plan being discussed by the through-care sub-group. There is regular engagement with Care Inspectorate who have attended the JSC to discuss the revised self-evaluation process.

**Bail and Release from Custody (Scotland) Act-** a phased implementation and roll-out of the provisions with implications for JSW, including bail supervision assessments and release planning.

**Near Me Digital Platform:** This allows social workers, third sector colleagues and other partners to engage with individuals in custody, in order to build relationships, in preparation for release. It has been well received and will be evaluated in due course.

## Other Activity

There has been a range of other opportunities to contribute to and profile the role of JSW:-

- Covid 19 inquiry with a focus on the impact on JSW and learning from the processes which were put in place during the pandemic
- National Collaborative- we have contributed to the interaction sessions, as a duty bearer, to help inform the practical application of the Charter. On 11/12/24, there will be a launch of the Charter of Rights for people Affected by Substance Use and the associated toolkit.

- Victims Taskforce- focus on how people affected by crime experience the criminal justice system and consider the impact of some recent and future planned legislative change
- Police Scotland stakeholder engagement to offer advice on Policing strategy
- Practice guidance revision in areas such as diversion from prosecution and home detention curfews
- Public Social Partnership- voluntary through-care: SWS has been involved with the screening and scoring of applications, as part of the commissioning process, to select the new provider of voluntary through-care services 2025-2028

## Workforce and Resources Standing Committee

### Background

The Workforce and Resources Standing Committee meets quarterly and exists to ensure the social work profession is adequately equipped, in respect of financial, human, and technological resources, to deliver its duties and functions. The Committee also supports Chief Social Work Officers in promoting the highest possible standards of professional practice locally. Over the course of 2024, the Contracts and Commissioning, and Learning & Development subgroups have continued to meet, and a Finance subgroup is in development with a planned commencement date of January 2025. We're also considering a Digital subgroup to facilitate discussion regarding digital transformation across social work services.

### Highlighted Activity

- Facilitated discussions on workforce pressures and potential solutions
- Engagement with the Care Inspectorate in respect of Strategic and Regulated Services Inspections
- Representation on the Scottish Government and COSLA-led Joint Social Services Taskforce and the Collaborative Resilience Assurance Group
- Cross representation from subgroups into other Policy and Practice areas.
- Liaison between Chief Social Work Officers (CSWOs) and Social Work Education Partnership SWEP around the introduction of the Newly Qualified Social Worker (NQSW) supported year
- Engagement with Care Inspectorate around the review of Social Work Governance
- Representation of CSWOs in addressing concerns re student placement funding
- Facilitated discussions with Scotland Excel (via the Contracts and Commissioning subgroup) to support future developments and partnership approaches
- Ensuring the thread of Self-Directed Support implementation is visible throughout the work of the Committee and the subgroups
- Engaging with various workstreams hosted by Care Inspectorate and Scottish Government in relation to the implementation of the Health & Social Care (staffing) Act 2019.

### Proposed Future Actions

In the discussions regarding the developing National Social Work Partnership between OCSWA, COSLA and Social Work Scotland, there has been an agreement that the area of Social Work Workforce Planning is a good platform for us to test the principles of the Partnership. This is in

recognition of the commitment shown by member organisations of the WRSC to a partnership approach, and the priority and status of workforce planning for social work.

Social Work Scotland, OCSWA and COSLA colleagues will meet in the coming weeks to undertake a mapping exercise of the range and level of social work workforce planning activity taking place across national spaces, so that a duplication/gap analysis can be undertaken. These three organisations will work together to develop a draft plan that can be brought to the group for discussion in early 2025.

## Digital Policy and Practice

### Background

The Digital Policy and Practice Advisor role was formed in 2022, to support priorities within Scottish Government and COSLA's joint Digital Health and Care Strategy. The continued priority of this role includes supporting Social Work Scotland, Scottish Government, the Office of the Chief Social Work Advisor, local authorities and Integrated Joint Boards to:

- Create the conditions for the implementation of technology and digital services/digital working in social work and social care.
- Supporting TEC teams to understand current social work-related issues and contexts, to inform the development of digital solutions.
- Secure relevant development and funding opportunities for social work
- Collaborate with other sector-based digital leads on pieces of work that support the delivery of the TEC programme.
- Support the development of proposals for the National Social Work Agency, ensuring priorities around digital and technology are incorporated.

### Highlighted Activity

**Near Me in Prisons:** Developed a project proposal with our Justice Lead to explore the potential benefits of using Near Me (secure video calling) within the justice system across the prison estate, including prison-based social work services. As a result of the developed project, there are now 87 individual users with Near Me access, including both local authority and third-sector partners, and 11 active waiting areas. Feedback has underscored benefits such as the ability to meet regularly, improved opportunity to read body language, significant travel time savings, and increased flexibility for scheduling meetings on short notice. The project has attracted attention from MSPs, including the Minister for Social Care and the Cabinet Secretary for Justice, particularly due to current pressures within the prison population. The goal is to expand the program rapidly across the prison estate, incorporating lessons learned from HMP Stirling's pilot phase.

**Expansion of use of Near Me wider Social Work:** Dumfries and Galloway's Hospital Discharge Teams now use Near Me to support assessments, reduce travel, and involve remote family members. Aberdeen City, West Lothian, Dundee, and North Lanarkshire are also exploring or already using Near Me in different contexts, with plans to evaluate and share insights from these experiences.



**Magic Notes Pilot:** Magic Notes, an AI tool developed for social work, assists practitioners by recording, transcribing, and summarizing conversations with clients. Beam, the developer, has proposed pilot programs to Chief Social Work Officers, with multiple local authorities considering a 4-month trial. We are coordinating this to ensure a cohesive approach, including data security and procurement processes. Pilots have already started in Dumfries and Galloway and Dundee, with pilots in Edinburgh, Orkney, and Fife commencing shortly. There are several other areas expressing interest, and we expect 8 different local authorities involved in pilots by the end of this year, with more to follow in early 2025. Social Work Scotland will facilitate shared learning sessions and support the post-trial evaluations.

**Digital Subgroup:** A Chair has been appointed chair and the group objectives finalised. The aim is to develop a space for social work leadership to collaborate, share practice, and provide peer support around digital innovation in practice.

**Promoting Digital in Social Work:** Ongoing input and workshops on digital integration in social work practice. Upcoming sessions are planned for the Social Work Scotland Substance Use and MHO Subgroups.

**Integrating broader Digital Initiatives:** We continue to be involved with other ongoing projects related to digital social work, including developments in the Digital Front Door, expanding digital telecare, utilising VR for training, implementing the Data Strategy, and enhancing digital skills among social work leaders.

## Proposed Future Actions

**Expanding Near Me across the Prison System to address overcrowding:** We'll explore how to use Near Me to support both the prison population crisis and reduce remand numbers, making it a potentially valuable tool for reassessment processes. Collaborative discussions with the Scottish Prison Service, Scottish Government, and justice social work leaders are scheduled for early January.

**Profile Near Me Project:** An application has been submitted to present learning from the Near Me in Prisons project at the European Social Network Conference in Denmark next June.

# Social Work Education Partnership

## Background

The Social Work Education Partnership (SWEP) Programme Office, is hosted by Social Work Scotland and is responsible for oversight and support of the four SWEP groups, delivering specific areas of work in collaboration with stakeholders, developing and driving implementation of the SWEP workplan and providing secretariat support for the Partnership. It presently consists of four staff members; Depute Partnership Delivery Manager, two Progress Leads and a Communications and Project Coordinator.

The SWEP group structure was redeveloped in 2024 and consists of four groups:

- **Strategic Group** – Chaired by Iain Ramsay, OCSWA. Responsible for providing strategic oversight and direction for all work across the Social Work Education Partnership. The membership of this group consists of senior leaders from all key stakeholders, including SSSC, CSWO, OCSWA, SWS, SASW, HEIs, CCPS and the Care Inspectorate.
- **Delivery Group** – Chaired by Cheryl Campbell, SSSC. Responsible for design and oversight of the SWEP workplan and delivery of intersectional areas of work.
- **Pre-Qualification Group** (early 2025) – Chaired by Arun Singh, CSWO, and Richard Ingram, University of Dundee. Responsible for identification of key issues impacting on pre-qualifying routes into Social Work, and development and implementation of work to address these.
- **Post-Qualification Group** (Jan 2025) – Chaired by Kirsty Lee, CSWO. Responsible for identification of key issues impacting on post-qualifying Social Work and development and implementation of work to address these. This includes the NQSW supported year and Advanced Practice Framework.

### Highlighted Activity

In early 2024 a full review was undertaken of the SWEP group structures, considering function, purpose, remit and membership. The strategic and delivery functions were split across two groups to increase capacity and representation, and the decision was taken for work across multiple different areas to be consolidated within two sub-groups: Pre-Qualification and Post-Qualification (as detailed above).

Between March and May 2024, the SWEP Programme Office conducted 15 engagement sessions to gather feedback from various stakeholders to shape future infrastructure to support social work education and the development of the future social work workforce. The SWEP Programme Office also participated in eight closed sessions with pre-established groups, including the Social Work Scotland Children and Families, Adults, and Workforce Resource Standing Committees. With 328 attendees, 249 unique individuals were directly engaged with.

In September 2024 a comprehensive report detailing the findings of these engagement sessions was presented to the SWEP Strategic Group, along with recommendations for systemic improvements needed across Social Work Education.

In mid-2024 the SWEP website was launched. The website provides a central communications channel for sharing the work ongoing across SWEP groups and all partners, as well as information about local and national events, and access to resources.

In November 2024 the SWEP Programme Office brought in colleagues from Iriss to facilitate a development session for members of the SWEP Strategic Group. The focus of this session was to identify shared priorities and begin to shape a 'SWEP Strategy' to underpin the work across the SWEP group structure.

### Proposed Future Actions

Work is underway to shape a SWEP Strategy to provide definition and clarity on the aims of the Partnership. This work aims to be concluded in early 2025.

Alongside the new group structure, the SWEP Programme Office are developing a comprehensive workplan to align with the SWEP Strategy and the remit and objectives of the individual SWEP groups.

Following on from discussions at the SWEP Strategic Group, a report will be published in late 2025 regarding the 'next steps' around the infrastructure work

In September 2024 it was proposed and agreed that the SWEP Strategic Group should seek to appoint an Independent Chairperson. This work is currently underway, led by the SWEP sponsor team within the Scottish Government and Social Work Scotland senior leadership.

## Save the Date

- **Thursday 12 June 2025**  
Adult Lives in Focus: Social Work Across Families, Justice, and Wellbeing  
Radisson Blu, Glasgow
- **Thursday 9 October 2025**  
Annual Conference and Exhibition  
TIC, University of Strathclyde, Glasgow

## Contact Us

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