



No More Blame Game – The Future for Children's Social Workers

**Conservative Party Commission on Social Workers
October 2007**

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Foreword

By the Rt Hon. David Cameron MP, Leader of the Opposition and the Conservative Party

Under my leadership the Conservative Party has undertaken a substantial and wide-ranging programme of research in order better to inform our policy making. Chief amongst these has been our determination to find solutions to help some of the most vulnerable members of our society. Iain Duncan Smith’s comprehensive work through the Social Justice Policy Unit has starkly articulated the challenges facing Britain’s ‘broken society’.

Social workers, particularly those dealing with child protection cases, are at the sharp end of these challenges, often dealing with very difficult and damaged families. They have a key role to play in early intervention to keep families together wherever possible, and in meeting the needs of vulnerable children who are taken into care when their safety is put at risk.

Their importance in meeting the challenges we face as a society is no less than that of the teachers, police officers or doctors. Indeed, their involvement can often prevent any need for the latter two professions to be involved. Yet the perception of social workers held by the rest of society rarely matches the sensitivity and importance of their work and the skills they need to employ. Quite simply they are often identified as part of the problem rather than an integral and helpful part of the solution. This situation has not been helped by the relative lack of attention given to their professional development by the Government compared to front line doctors and teachers, and the willingness of some parts of the media to point a finger of blame when high profile cases go wrong.

This blame game cannot benefit the vulnerable families who need the involvement of social workers, let alone the professional social workers themselves. That is why this is an important piece of work, and why I was so pleased that Tim Loughton set up this Commission a year ago. He has put together an impressive team of professionals, practitioners and service users who have taken submissions from a great many experts in the field. They have come together not out of any affiliation to the Conservative Party but out of a genuine interest and dedication to inform the debate and find solutions. I am grateful for their contributions and their willingness to engage with the Conservative Party in this neglected area.

I hope that the report of the Commission will be read widely by practitioners, service users and those responsible for employing social workers in local authorities both at officer and elected representative level, where our own councillors have a key role to play. Most of all I hope that the Government will take this as a constructive addition to the debate on how we improve the status, responsibilities and perception of social workers, and respond positively to the Commission’s proposals.

Commission on Social Workers

Tim Loughton MP

Commission Chairman and Shadow Minister for Children

Recent research by the General Social Care Council revealed that only 40% of the population see the contribution of social workers to society as ‘very important’. This is perhaps unsurprising when another survey found that more than half understood little or nothing about what social work involves.

Misconceptions are too often fuelled by stereotyped social worker characters as they appear in the media, ranging from slightly alternative liberal busybodies to out-and-out child snatchers. Invariably they are panned, either for turning up too late after some terrible fate has befallen a vulnerable child or for intervening too early as the agents of ‘nanny state’. Even children’s computer games portray the appearance of the social worker as a ‘game over’ moment. Rarely do we read in the tabloids about the families who have been held together through the dedication and professionalism of social services. But then no one is interested in hearing about the plane that lands safely!

Yet a good social worker is as crucial to the well-being of vulnerable children or to the survival of damaged families as a doctor is to the health of his patient or a teacher to the learning chances of his pupil. In other countries, notably in northern Europe where the concept of pedagogues has long been admired, social workers are respected on a par with teachers, doctors and other public service professionals. This inevitably makes for a more confident profession whose practitioners particularly question the risk-averse nature of social work in the UK. If social workers are seen as part of the problem rather than part of the solution, no wonder there is concern about their morale.

If we are truly to tackle the increasing problems of fragmenting families, child abuse and a ‘broken society’ then surely it is essential that the professionals on the ground are able to make a difference, and are properly respected, motivated and resourced. Every child death enquiry from Maria Colwell to Victoria Climbié has highlighted the weaknesses in the system. Yet despite some signs of improvement, helped in part by the introduction of the social work degree qualification, recruitment and retention remains poor. In a field where establishing long term empathy and relationships with difficult subjects is crucial, the continuity of staff leaves a lot to be desired.

Vacancy rates in London and the West Midlands are currently around 18% and turnover in London around 15%. The demographic challenge posed by the large numbers of social workers recruited in the 1970s who are coming up to retirement places even greater reliance on converting social work graduates into front line professionals. And when they are on the job their vulnerability to the stress of heavy and punishing caseloads is a major problem. Social workers currently have one of the highest rates of absence from work, double the sick leave of teachers, and stress-related claims cost the taxpayer £13 million last year.

After repeating the same mantras at Association of Directors of Social Services conferences over several years about the need to improve the image, status and

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responsibility of social workers it was time to move the agenda on. Spurred on by the suggestions of Elizabeth Butler-Sloss at a Conservative seminar in the House of Commons last year on early childhood development I set up a Commission to look at this problem and put forward proposals for change and improvement. The Commission was announced at the ADSS conference in 2006 and is now reporting its findings a year later.

We are fortunate to have secured the services of a range of professionals, practitioners and academics who have brought a wealth of experience to the task. Their credentials are set out in this report and I am very grateful for all the time and work they have contributed. We have also benefited from the guidance of Elizabeth Butler-Sloss and Herbert Laming as our patrons. Whilst the Commission has been set up under the auspices of the Conservative Party and our findings will feed into the Conservative policy review process, it has been conducted on a non-partisan basis and the contributions of the Commission members is borne out of their dedication and interest in the subject rather than any political affiliation.

The initial response to this foray into untypical territory for a Conservative-led initiative was mixed. ‘Never mind about hugging Hoodies. If they’re hugging social workers the Conservative Party really are thinking the unthinkable,’ one commentator wrote. For the most part, however, this Commission has been welcomed as addressing a problem that must be resolved in an area that is neither a vote winner nor headline grabber, but that does not make it any less important to a great many people.

We have decided to focus on social work with children, although many of our observations are generic and equally applicable to those professionals working with adult service users. Our investigations over the last year have taken the form of a quasi-select committee and a total of nine ‘hearings’ have been held in the House of Commons. Our original requests for submissions met with a plethora of written responses from over 80 organisations, professionals, local authorities and individuals, from whom witnesses were drawn to give oral evidence.

Our task has been made easier by the enormous amount of work contributed by Flick Drummond who has acted as clerk to the Commission, sorted the evidence and prepared this report, aided by my Parliamentary researcher Ruth Farrer-Langton.

Our deliberations are far from exhaustive and there are areas where we would like to have made further enquiries. It was particularly disappointing that our requests for submissions from the media largely went unanswered. It was a recurrent and not facetious suggestion that cropped up in our discussions that improving the image could be greatly helped by a popular TV drama based on the life and work of social workers. Dramas and soaps revolving round doctors, nurses, teachers and even forensic pathologists are now commonplace on our screens after all, so why not social workers to make them more user friendly to the general public? This also raised the issue of who speaks for social workers – the Department of Health, the unions, the regulators? Whoever it is clearly needs a better megaphone and decent PR.

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From New Zealand we spoke to the Chief Social Worker whose high profile status has been integral to the ‘fight back’ against the misconceptions of social work, and who has even been offered a regular national newspaper column to expound her work. Closer to home several local authorities have taken a conscious decision to invest heavily in social worker recruitment, training and incentivisation and it is bearing fruit. Hackney is pioneering a bold ‘Reclaiming Social Work’ campaign based on highly motivated social worker units. In Barnet the ‘Got a new Barnet?’ campaign has succeeded in bringing down vacancy rates drastically, and by one measure of education achievement for looked after children the benefits are clear. With the current focus on the scandal that is the outcomes of looked after children and the forthcoming Bill, this is a vulnerable group who needs most urgently to see improvements in the standards and accessibility of social workers.

The measurability of social work success is not always clear. It certainly cannot be assessed by the numbers of children taken into care, for example, and much of the current criticism of children’s services departments revolves around potentially perverse incentives for increasing the number of adoptions introduced with the Adoption Act. If the success of social workers’ efforts results in preventative work that keeps a family from breaking up how do you measure that negative? As the Children’s Rights Director Roger Morgan put it, ‘no sort of placement is best’ - and it is interesting to note that despite all the negative press, his report reveals that the approval rating shown by young people in care for their social workers is surprisingly high. The Commission has also been keen to secure the responses of young service users themselves.

Inevitably much of our discussions have been taken up with processes, not least around the substance and length of the new degree course and subsequent on-the-job training, management structures and accountability. But we have tried to focus most on what works, what enables social workers to take decisions at the sharp end with maximum speed and minimum bureaucracy. We have considered how better to manage the caseload burden on staff and how to make sure that the best workers are not lost to the practice by taking on management roles. We have also looked into the effectiveness of inter-agency working and the current team structures which can exacerbate a silo mentality.

We hope that this report will inform the constructive debate that is long overdue – namely how best we can improve the status, perceptions, responsibilities and acceptance of professional social workers. By doing so we will make their job easier and more effective, and therefore provide a better service for the vulnerable families and children who rely on them. Not to do so, as we have seen so many times before, is a false economy and represents society’s continued failure of some of its weakest members.



Patrons to the Commission on Social Workers

Lord Laming of Tewin

Former Chief Inspector of the Social Services Inspectorate

Tim Loughton deserves great credit for having established and managed the work of this Social Work Commission. It was a challenging project but I am most impressed by the thought which has been devoted to a wide range of issues which are of importance to us all. The contribution that social workers make to the well being of individuals, families and communities is all too often recognised only at the point of personal crisis. In those circumstances social workers are often described as ‘life savers’.

The report of the Commission highlights issues of key importance about the future of social work and the leadership and support which are so essential both in achieving quality standards and in reducing expensive staff turnover. Social workers are called upon to help the most vulnerable people in our society. They do so on behalf of us all. In that they deserve our understanding and support. I hope this report will be widely read and its recommendations carefully considered. I commend it most warmly.

Baroness Butler-Sloss of Marsh Green

Former President of the Family Division

The role of the social worker is immensely important. It is often the front line in the support and protection of children who need help or are at serious risk of injury or abuse. The job is as responsible and demanding as that of a nurse or a teacher. Nowadays the training required to qualify is similarly rigorous and high standards of conduct and practice are regulated by the General Social Care Council.

It is therefore astonishing and regrettable that a social worker does not enjoy the same degree of public recognition and respect as a nurse or teacher or those with other similar responsibilities. I was therefore delighted when the Social Workers Commission was set up by Tim Loughton MP and his team, creating an opportunity to take evidence, consider the existing position of social workers and make recommendations.

The result is a careful and thoughtful analysis of the evidence received and a most valuable and helpful set of recommendations which range widely across the public image, media presentation, training, recruitment and retention, and skills and knowledge required. The Commission considered the position of social workers in other countries, relationships with families and children, the important issue of the stress on the individual and, perhaps one of the most telling points, the necessity for communication with all with whom they come into contact.

This is an excellent report. I commend it and hope it will be widely read and acted upon.

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Glossary

1. Summary of recommendations

1. The generic nature of social work must be maintained and resources better targeted to enable social workers to work with families in a preventative role.
2. The role of Consultant Social Worker - a senior practitioner - should be re-introduced to keep experienced social workers on the front line, and an appropriate career and pay structure should be put in place to support those who do not wish to go into management.
3. Every social worker should be encouraged and have the opportunity to become a member of a professional body, similar to the BMA or RCN, which could advocate on their behalf, negotiate on salaries and conditions of service, provide good PR on behalf of the profession as a whole, and influence future government policy. Consideration should be given to a requirement that employers (including agency employers) fund this membership for the first post-qualifying year to ensure all new entrants to the profession can become members.
4. We recommend a Chief Social Worker (similar to the role of the Chief Social Worker in New Zealand) be employed in the Department of Health in the Office of the Director General of Social Care. He or she would work across government departments, with UNISON, BASW and other representative bodies and with the media to monitor the ‘health’ of the profession and with the media providing them with good news stories and cases.
5. The social work degree must continue to be generic to allow social workers a good foundation in all aspects of social work.
6. The content and length of the degree must be reviewed to ensure that it provides a sufficient knowledge, theory, legislative, research and practice base, and extending it to four years should be considered.
7. Multi-agency training should be incorporated into the qualifying degree and should continue to be part of continuing professional development.
8. We recommend that the Department of Health and the Department of Children, Schools and Families work with local authorities and other employers of social workers to ensure that resources (both in course fees and replacement time) are available to ensure that all social workers can undertake the level of post-qualifying education and training necessary for the roles and tasks they are employed to undertake.

9. There should be a combination of a national recruitment campaign and local ‘head-hunting’ to encourage more people to enter social work.

10. There should be a high impact advertising campaign similar to that launched for the army, police and teachers, which sends a clear message that the role of social workers is important in society and should be respected.

11. The establishment of Newly Qualified Social Worker (NQSW) status is essential to support and retain inexperienced social workers. This should include protected caseloads and guaranteed post qualifying study and training time.

12. There needs to be a flexible pay structure which corresponds with other similar professionals working in multi-agency teams and which recognises differences in living costs around the country.

13. Numerical adoption targets and other targets which are not in the best interests of the child should be phased out.

14. Better targeted funding should go into research and development of social care.

Evidence and Findings

2. Introduction

The role of social workers has become increasingly important in modern society where changing patterns of employment and an increase in marital breakdown have meant families have become removed from the traditional family structure and may be geographically distanced from family support. Parenting is one of the most important and difficult roles in our society but there is no training or education in how to bring up children and it can be isolating and expensive. There is little social recognition of how hard it is to be a parent and success appears to be defined in our society by job titles or income rather than as a mother or father. Many families are also struggling to bring up children with physical, mental or learning difficulties which can cause huge tensions within the family with few outlets of support. Family stresses are further exacerbated by an increase in the abuse of drugs and alcohol, and by rises in the numbers of parents suffering from mental illness or with learning disabilities.

Social workers therefore have a crucial role in supporting parents, ensuring that families are kept together as far as possible, and - where there are crises - that support and procedures are in place to safeguard both children and adults. Many of the witnesses stated that social workers are dealing with the ‘ills of society’ but that they are rarely recognised or supported by the public in this role. This Commission was formed to find out why this is the case and how we can change the perception that social workers are only there to take children away.

Although this Commission has been looking at the role of social workers in children’s services, it is very clear that any work with children also affects adults in the family and community. Social work services help parents to overcome disabilities, mental ill health and addictions which have an impact on the general well-being of the family. Therefore social workers should be able to respond effectively in this wider context.

3. The present public image of social workers

3.1 Introduction

Social workers themselves and those who represent them frequently express concerns about the profession’s public image. Yet the image of social workers among those who use the service is generally positive. The Association of Directors of Children’s Services (ADCS) reported that research has shown that there is a mismatch between the public perception of social workers and that of social work service users who report high levels of satisfaction with the service they receive. However, there is a reluctance on the part of the profession to share success stories because of client confidentiality.

The level and duration of training of social workers is now similar to that of teachers and nurses, and its content (combining values, knowledge and practice skills) similar to that of doctors and psychologists with whom social workers work closely. This may change the image of social workers and give them parity in pay and status which at present, according to Skills for Care, are among the lowest of the professional occupations.

3.2 Definition of Social Work

The definition of social work as defined by the International Federation of Social Workers states:

‘The social work profession promotes social change, problem solving in human relationships and the empowerment and liberation of people to enhance well-being. Utilising theories of human behaviour and social systems, social work intervenes at the points where people interact with their environments. Principles of human rights and social justice are fundamental to social work.’

BASW adds to this definition:

‘Social workers attempt to relieve and prevent hardship and suffering. They have a responsibility to help individuals, families, groups and communities through the provision and operation of appropriate services and by contributing to social planning. They work with, on behalf of, or in the interests of people to enable them to deal with personal and social difficulties and obtain essential resources and services. Their work may include, but is not limited to, interpersonal practice, groupwork, community work, social development, social action, policy development, research, social work education and supervisory and managerial functions in these fields.’

There was a strong feeling from submissions and witnesses that, in practice, the social work role is poorly defined. Some witnesses called for a public debate which would focus on the need to recognise that the role of social workers involves maintaining a balance between helping families, being accountable for the use of resources and providing protective services, when necessary through the use of coercive powers.

As the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC) wrote, ‘protecting children is everyone’s responsibility, not only that of Social workers’. However, as one social worker stated, ‘with the present nanny state mentality, personal responsibility is something unknown to most social services clients and social workers are meant to fill all the gaps and meet all the needs’.

On a more practical level, social workers are well recognised as enablers particularly with vulnerable people as Anthony Kirk QC wrote:

‘They can sort out housing problems, medical appointments, benefit claims, nursery placements, home help etc. It is in these sorts of areas that their contribution is invaluable, particularly so with vulnerable parents, and that must receive greater public recognition. The list is endless. The time may never come where parents are proud to ‘own’ their social worker, as they might the family GP or the health visitor, but it is at least something to aim for.’

Dr Gall, a social worker, commented that many of ‘*the former skills of family therapy, direct work with the family and children and counselling skills seem to be disappearing and these jobs are being given out to “experts” in defined roles and disciplines, resulting in long delays in intervention. The actual expectation of social workers’ role in the family is somewhat hazy and many of their direct powers have been eroded over time, whilst personal responsibility has increased’.*

There was general agreement that social workers should be seen as people who safeguard children in a positive and proactive way, and should be working in schools, doctor’s surgeries and beside community workers so they are seen as approachable rather than threatening. Often there is a social stigma in attending child-care centres whereas the same service might be more acceptable if it was offered in a school, health or community setting.

3.3 The relationship between child protection work and preventative child and family social work

Social workers working in the voluntary sector were seen as having a more positive image than those working in local authorities whose main role is

seen as the enforcement of child protection legislation. The change of emphasis in the move from “child protection” to family support written in the 1989 and 2004 Children Acts does not seem to have penetrated the public consciousness – were it to do so, this might benefit the public’s understanding of the social worker’s role. Social workers working in voluntary organisations such as the NSPCC, Welcare or The Adolescent and Children’s Trust (TACT) are seen as family-friendly, involved – for example - with adoption and fostering as well as helping families stay together. Some of the preventative work is commissioned by local authorities but provided by voluntary organisations such as NCH or Barnardo's.

There was concern that the Government Green Paper ‘Care Matters’ would mean that local authority social workers would be left with only the unpopular regulatory role, responsible only for the difficult aspects of social work such as child protection, while voluntary organisations would be involved in the more satisfying preventative tasks. This would have a negative impact on the image of the local authority social worker and make it even harder for local authorities to recruit. This fear may be partly behind the recent trend for local authorities to bring work back in-house that has previously been commissioned from the voluntary sector. TACT reported that:

‘Local authorities, who commission services, appear to regard service providers as a threat rather than a source of experience and proven in the delivery of high-quality services.’

Welcare commented in their submission that service users ‘like Welcare social workers because they are less formal, ask them what they want to achieve instead of telling them what to do, and meet their practical and most urgent needs first (e.g. food, debts, benefits)’. They commented that ‘a big criticism of local authority social workers is that they make false promises and fail to deliver!’

The delivery of promised decisions and honouring of financial commitments were particularly important to the children and young people who responded to the Children’s Rights Director for England’s 2006 survey.

It is important to look at the balance of statutory and voluntary provision in the context of the desired profile of the profession as a whole. UNISON’s response to the Care Matters Green Paper objected to the possible fragmentation of the service to children in care that could result in an large scale move to the proposed independent care practices, with the local authority being left with the unattractive aspects of ‘taking children into care’ and then handing them on to private or voluntary organisations. UNISON states that ‘lines of accountability and the coherence of the

“corporate parent” role would be undermined’ as well as continuity for the child and family.’

3.4 The public image of social workers

Most people have little or no contact with social workers in contrast with their relationship with other professionals such as doctors and teachers, and therefore rely on the media for their views of social workers. There is a lack of clarity in the public mind about what social workers do and how it relates to other professions who appear to have better public relations. Social workers’ negative image has been attributed to the nature of the work which is largely associated by the public with child protection and mental health services rather than supporting and empowering people. One social worker commented that even other professionals they worked with had little understanding of what social workers actually do and associate social work with ‘taking children away’ to solve the family’s problems.

There is a stigma of failure if a social worker is seen to be intervening in a family as the social worker is identified with personal inadequacy and the fear that the children will be taken away. Some parents are afraid to ask for help for fear that their children might be removed. Often social workers are dealing with those who are marginalised in society and may become identified with them.

Family barrister Jessica Lee wrote:

‘Due to resource pressures, they are now seen as “bad guys” who only appear to intervene and remove children rather than be able to offer the supportive role that they feel they used to be able to provide to families.’

BAAF stated:

‘Their work demands the deepest understanding into the nature of the human condition and the personal cost to them of doing so can be high. In the public eye, social workers have become too easily identified with the problems of their clients.’

The GSCC stated that social work is often seen as the poor relation in a professional world; ‘only 40% of the population see the contribution of social workers to society as very important’. However, a recent survey by Community Care magazine and BASW contradicts this, and finds that the public value the role of social workers highly. The basic supportive practical family care and successful interventions rarely make news headlines in the popular press although a more positive image is beginning to reappear.

The Chief Social Worker of New Zealand commented in her interview that she has been offered a regular column in a national newspaper in her role as Chief Social Worker and that good news stories are being published in New Zealand.

As Dr Gall wrote, ‘some stories are worth telling to raise awareness of how our taxes are being spent on all these people’.

3.5 Social workers and the media

Social workers often receive a disproportionate share of blame in highly publicised cases even though a team of professionals from health, education and police is usually involved, and major decisions about children can only be made by the courts. This singling out of social workers for blame was commented on in much of the evidence we received as contributing to the negative image.

The social worker’s negative image is highlighted in the media coverage of cases where failures are often reported and successes rarely. The term ‘social worker’ is often used by the media for anyone working in social care although the term ‘social worker’ is now a protected title. Steps should be taken to ensure that there is greater accuracy in how the term is used in the media.

The Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (CAFCASS) wrote that the press picks up on the personal stories which repeat ‘stereotyping of politically correct social workers e.g. in relation to trans-racial adoption placements, social workers who are hell-bent on removing children from innocent parents or social workers who fail to protect a vulnerable child or adult.’

However, insightful evidence received from the Daily Mail shows that the media have in fact a greater understanding of the difficulties faced by social workers than some of the stories published suggest:

‘They are under-funded and under-resourced...there are staff shortages everywhere.’

The effect of the negative press has an impact on the self esteem and confidence of social workers. Family court lawyer Helen Grant wrote:

‘The media relies upon simplified and generalised tabloid sensationalism to sell papers and grab audiences. The resulting demonisation of individuals positively undermines the vocation and disincentivises quality individuals from becoming involved’.

Anthony Kirk QC pointed out that, because of the closed nature of the family courts, the media usually have to rely on limited information often sourced from the parents who are likely to be to be partisan and lacking in balance.

Comments from Robin Esser, Executive Managing Editor of the Daily Mail supported this view:

‘The public’s appreciation of the good work social workers achieve and people’s understanding of it is often shrouded by the secrecy which surrounds family courts and the privacy which guards family life. More balanced stories would appear if the media was told or was able to be told of the full circumstances which surround a court decision.’

Mr Esser suggested that those responsible for social workers needed to ensure that the media was more frequently aware of their successes - a point which the panel wholeheartedly supports. It was unfortunate that very few of the newspaper editors whom we contacted to provide evidence to the Commission were able to reply, and thus their views could not be subjected to the more detailed scrutiny of one of the oral witness sessions.

3.6 Who represents social workers?

The lack of a strong organisation or trade union body responsible for public relations for social workers was noted by witnesses and there seemed little agreement on who should be responsible for representing social workers to the media and publicising good practice. There are 76,000 social workers registered with the GSCC but only 11,000 social workers belong to BASW and 40,000 are represented by UNISON. This contrasts with the British Medical Association which represents the interests of 70% of doctors and the Royal College of Nurses which represents 60% of nurses. Social services are still portrayed as the least attractive of public service issues to campaign on.

This lack of representation means that social workers do not have a strong voice in the debates shaping the role and future development of social work. There should be more clearly defined mechanisms for social workers to contribute to Government policy making and to impact on the way their work is reported in the media.

Welcare argues that because:

‘social workers are passionate advocates, local authorities and government should allow them time to contribute to the formation of policy and procedures that direct their work, respect and listen to them and engage with them and they will stop leaving the profession in droves’.

3.7 The links between the social work profession in the UK and the European profession of social pedagogue

Several witnesses mentioned social pedagogy which is an integral part of the child welfare system in some European countries. While it is appreciated that much of the social pedagogue role is already carried out in the UK by social workers and other professionals such as health visitors and therapists, it may be that integrating and capitalising on what is there will improve social work and the image of social workers. The Local Government Association (LGA) wrote:

‘The image of social workers is more positive in a number of European countries and in several is linked to a professional model of social pedagogy that gives social workers a very different role in early intervention, prevention and educational support to vulnerable, challenging and excluded children and their families.....Ideally the LGA would like to see the best elements of social pedagogy built into the role of social workers.’

A National Voice also mentioned that European social pedagogy adopts a more ‘holistic approach considering the social worker–young person relationship as therapeutic’, whereas in the UK young people often feel that social workers fail to understand the emotional needs of children in care. This was echoed in the Director of Children’s Rights’ 2006 report in which a good social worker was one who could ‘spot when you are crying out for help’ and ‘act on the child’s concerns’. Children and young people also mentioned that a good social worker ‘would concentrate on what was good for the child. Poor social workers would often concentrate on what was best for the adult, such as a child’s parent or carer’ and usually believe the adult rather than the child.

The panel did not have the opportunity to look into the full detail required to support the introduction of the European profession of social pedagogue into the UK, but there is much to indicate that child and family social work could benefit if some aspects of the role and training of pedagogy were incorporated into social work education and practice in the UK.

3.8 Social workers from other countries

Several of the local authorities commented that social workers from other countries are surprised at the poor image and lack of respect of social work in Britain. Some witnesses stated that in New Zealand, Australia, Canada, Denmark and Sweden social work has a more positive image and is more highly regarded.

Buckinghamshire County Council, which has a number of Canadian social workers wrote that in Canada ‘they had a lot more autonomy and were trusted to make decisions without an action being approved by several layers of managers before it could be carried out’.

Some of the other countries have had a three to four year degree course for many years and this may make their social workers seem better trained. The London Borough of Hounslow submission mentioned that:

‘The observation of UK social work from social workers recruited (from other countries) is that UK social work is bureaucratic, paper driven, completion of countless forms that serve little real purpose. The court processes are prolonged with scant regard for the “expert” testimony of social workers. That foster carers are well supported and that the UK have far fewer breakdowns in placement. The workload and the pressure are greater than they would accept (in their home countries) together with an expectation that front line staff undertake unpaid overtime.’

These comments need to be put into context as it is often the most adventurous, confident and, possibly, most competent workers who travel abroad. More importantly, in some of these countries the front line assessment and child protection work is undertaken by unqualified workers thus protecting the qualified workers from the most stressful work. This is not a practice we would wish to encourage in the UK, where we consider it important that only qualified social workers should be accountable for child protection decision making and the social work service provided to children in care.

3.9 Summary

- The image that the British public have of social workers was agreed to be generally poor but some witnesses considered that it is improving.
- There was agreement that there needs to be greater public recognition of the job that social workers do and government recognition that the image of the local authority social worker will not improve if they are left with a purely regulatory role.
- Despite the several different organisations representing social workers, they have not succeeded in communicating the achievements of social work to the media or to the general public . This is especially true of child and family social workers who tend to get a less good ‘press’ because of the complexities of their child protection role. A concerted effort is needed to improve the image presented by the media.

- There are elements of social pedagogy in social work already in the UK but this could be enhanced by a more holistic approach to child and family social work practice.
 - Social workers from other countries are reported to be surprised by the poor image of social workers in the UK, and by the extent of bureaucratic tasks when compared to direct contact with children, parents and carers.
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4. Training and knowledge

4.1 Introduction

The new degree qualification was welcomed by everyone although there were concerns about the variation in quality of the teaching and practice placements. There was also much discussion on the length and content of the degree and the balance between theory and practice, i.e. that more time is needed for the acquisition of relevant knowledge. This led some to argue that a four year degree was necessary so that the same length of time on placement could be retained. A review of the degree course by the GSCC is being undertaken at present.

There were some suggestions that a common foundation year should be introduced, to include other professions working with vulnerable children such as doctors, nurses and teachers. Funding of the post-qualifying framework has been insufficient and needs to be increased, particularly to help with workload relief for those undertaking the training.

4.2 Skills and knowledge

One of the criticisms of social work training was summed up by Professor Harriet Ward:

‘Social work training has focused too much on the acquisition of skills, and too little on the acquisition of knowledge. As a result, social workers are often unaware of the evidence they need to inform their practice in key areas.....The lack of an acknowledged evidence base is one of the major reasons why social work is often viewed negatively by both the courts and other professions.’

Professor Ward mentioned that there is a culture in social work that professional decision-making should be guided by experience and intuition rather than by evidence, and this was echoed by other witnesses and submissions. The National Children’s Bureau (NCB) stated that they hoped that ‘degree level training will bring back diagnostic, analytical skills rather than the more practical case management functions that have dominated in recent years’.

The lack of analytical and reflective training has been noticed in courts. Richard Lingham, former director of social services in Cornwall, wrote that in the case of social workers:

‘It is not unusual for written and oral evidence to be less well presented than those of other professional witnesses.....Social workers appear more susceptible to challenge on the accuracy of their factual evidence and more likely to show limitations in expressing and defending their professional opinions,’

There was evidence given by SCIE and other witnesses that more training is needed in communication with children and how to listen to what they want. A National Voice spokesperson mentioned that social work training needed more emphasis on how to communicate with children and understand their emotional makeup. The Oxford Parent-Infant Project (OXPIP) stated that:

‘All Social workers intending to work with families would benefit from undertaking a course in infant observation and much more significant training in child development.’

This is now included in some of the new social work degree programmes and most, though not all, of the post qualifying award in children and families social work, building on the child development curriculum set down in the degree and occupational standards.

4.3 Degree course

Opinions differed between witnesses as to whether the degree course should be longer to allow more time for the teaching of knowledge. At present 50% of the time is spent on practice. Some other countries have four-year degree courses and social work graduates are encouraged to take a Masters degree after the completion of their undergraduate social work degree.

It was recognised that the required content of the degree appropriately includes teaching on psychology, theory on common issues such as attachment, neurology problems and substance abuse, mental ill-health, sociology and social policy. However, doubts were expressed about the quality and depth of some of the teaching, given the crowded curriculum and the requirements of practice learning.

There is concern that the heavy reliance on practice placements means that students do not receive the knowledge base they need. This is particularly important in court, where evidence based on good knowledge of the clients’ problems is crucial and social workers require a good understanding of all the relevant issues.

Some witnesses stated that academics teaching social work courses need to update their own practice knowledge and that they should spend some time in the field to ensure that course content is relevant. Service users should be

able to contribute to the development of theory. It was mentioned by some witnesses that it would be useful for senior practitioners to share their experiences by taking time out of fieldwork to teach. In some universities (but not all) both service users and senior practitioners are involved in education in this way, and the panel believes that both should be strongly encouraged.

A significant concern is that many local authority children’s services departments are overstretched, meaning that the number of quality placements for students is limited.

4.4 Generic or specialist degree?

There were differing views on whether the degree should be generic or should require specialisation in one of the two main areas of social work: children’s services or work with adults. It was recognised that mental health social work is another potential specialism, which has areas in common with both children’s and adult services. The majority of witnesses indicated that a generic degree was preferable with specialisation at the post-qualifying stage.

The NCB wrote:

‘The Common Core of training mirrors many of the core skills of social work and now makes these skills part of the remit of all children and young people’s practitioners. This is not necessarily a bad thing but it may not be sufficient to meet the needs of children and young people with complex problems nor families where an early multi-faceted intervention of some sophistication is necessary to prevent deterioration.’

CSCI mentioned in the interview that social workers are very keen to be trained generically because many of the skills can be transferred between adults and children’s services, and because child protection work is complex and requires competence in working with parents who may be mentally ill or have addiction problems or disabilities. Generic training allows flexibility of career choice and is valued by social workers. It may also be an added incentive in recruitment to the profession.

UNISON commented in the interview that their members believe that generic training is essential, and value the holistic nature of the profession which enables them to undertake varied roles during their career. There is recognition that specialisation is necessary, but should remain something that occurs after a generic training. In support of this, TACT stated that there are common areas and core values to the whole of social work, which should be maintained.

The importance of training for the role of the social worker in the family setting was also mentioned in the submission by BAAF:

‘Assessment (diagnostic) skills and service delivery (treatment) skills can only be pursued meaningfully within the context of the on-going relationship that the social worker has with the child and family concerned. While there may be direct evidence from physical signs and symptoms of abuse (and in many cases these are disputed in relation to their cause), the social worker will need to put these into the context of what they know or can discover about the children and family circumstances. Any ‘hard’ evidence from signs and symptoms will need to be placed in the context of the more extensive ‘soft’ evidence about relationships within the family, the intentions and capabilities of the parents and the support and services available to them.’

When questioned, several witnesses stated specialist training could be taken after the generic degree.

4.5 Newly Qualified Social Worker status

The panel unanimously supported the proposal to introduce a Newly Qualified Social Worker (NQSW) status which would ensure a level of support similar to that of a Newly Qualified Teacher. BASW mentioned that NQSW status should involve the consolidation of learning in practice and that NQSWs should be supported during the probationary period. Some local authorities already have good systems in place. For example, Buckinghamshire County Council have 1:1 support and development workshops for new social workers but have relied on a specific grant which will run out in 2008.

Unfortunately not all Newly Qualified Social Workers get the necessary support and UNISON wrote that:

‘Many NQSWs are thrown into deployment without sufficient support and supervision leading to stress and burn-out and loss of social workers to the profession because of bad early experiences. A guarantee of a reduced caseload and structured additional supervision would address this along with opportunities for wider professional support networks such as mentoring and NQSW networks.’

4.6 Post-qualification and management training

The new registration requirement means that all social workers have to spend 90 hours or 15 days on training to further their professional

development over a three year period in order to be re-registered. This has been welcomed but there is concern over whether the training is in practice just ticking the boxes or whether it actually improves knowledge and skills. There is also the danger that employers who are overstretched are not giving enough time to social workers to undertake the newly accredited post qualifying training programmes. UNISON quoted an example in which four out of five social workers who had started GSCC-accredited post qualifying training had to drop out because of pressure of poor staffing levels which meant that they had to return to working on heavy caseloads.

Buckinghamshire County Council pointed out that very few universities provide theory as well as practical training for the Post-Qualifying Framework for staff at their place of work. Buckinghamshire County Council welcomed the arrangement they have with Bournemouth University for taught elements as well as the practical elements of the programme to be taught on Buckinghamshire premises. Gloucestershire County Council also mentioned that they maintain strong links with the local university which provides pre and post-qualifying programmes which has also helped recruitment and retention.

4.7 Interagency training

Interagency and multi-professional training was seen as essential as many social workers work in multi-agency teams. Professor Richard Rose of Nottingham University wrote that:

‘At present there is no real interface between teachers, social workers, health visitors and other key workers during their initial training. Hence, the first contact which these professionals have with each other is often in a stressful and sometimes potentially life threatening situation. Professionals across these disciplines have little true perception of each others’ roles and this needs to be addressed at the earliest juncture in training.’

There are examples of where the lack of knowledge of each others’ roles is beginning to be addressed. Dr Gray wrote about a first year programme at the University of Brighton where social workers, medical students, nurses, psychiatrists, and refugees were brought together to discuss case scenarios and to explore the prejudices and stereotypes that they held about each other:

‘There is evidence starting to emerge that inter-professional education (where students from one or more professional groups come together to learn from and about each other to improve collaboration and quality of care) can lead to more effective team work.....An important side effect of

this process has been the special working relationship and respect that has developed between the social work and medical tutors.’

The NSPCC commented on how a common foundation year for all professionals working in the children’s services would ensure an understanding of each others’ professions and how they could work together. One social worker stated that the knowledge of the aims and limitations of each other’s jobs is paramount and would help interagency working. This social worker also felt that, while some other professionals did not have enough psychological knowledge or understanding of how families operated, as they were used to dealing with individuals, social workers looked at the longer term picture.

The Metropolitan Police, who work with social workers every day, mentioned the Multi-Agency Critical Incidence Exercise (MACIE) which trains social workers and police jointly in how to protect children. This has proved to be effective where it has been established but depends on investment from the individual boroughs. From October 2007 all police officers will be trained in the new arrangements introduced following the ‘Every Child Matters’ report, to ensure that children will be at the centre of any decisions.

There needs to be more specific training in operational and strategic management and leadership. This is particularly important with the multi-agency teams where effective relationships are needed because of the potential for misunderstandings, different priorities, cultures and language. There is also a need to clarify who is responsible for the funding, commissioning and provision of interagency training.

4.8 Funding for post qualifying training

There is insufficient funding for post qualifying training and lack of clarity about funding services in local authorities. Gloucestershire County Council wrote:

‘Existing funds have been insufficient to meet the objectives of the replaced Quality Protects targets for the Child Care Award and will not meet the demands of the new General Social Care Council’s post-qualifying framework and expectations that every social worker will achieve an award at a relevant level.’

The Oxford Parent-Infant Project (OXPIP) also noticed the lack of funding and stressed how important post-qualifying training is:

‘More funding needs to be available to social work departments for ongoing training of their staff. Ongoing professional development and management

support are critical to ensure that approaches, awareness and ways of working with families utilise up-to-date practice.’

4.9 Summary

- The degree course has been welcomed but there are concerns about the quality of content, teaching and practice placements.
 - The majority view of witnesses was that the degree course should remain generic to all social workers with specialist assessed courses at post-qualifying level to be a requirement before undertaking the full range of child and family social work.
 - There was a general welcome for the proposed Newly Qualified Social Worker (NQSW) status to ensure that these workers receive the necessary support and appropriate caseloads.
 - There are concerns about the lack of time and funding for post-qualification training and to meet the continuing professional development requirements needed for re-registration with GSCC.
 - Inter-professional training is essential to strengthen professional collaboration and respect and would lead to better interagency working and more effective outcomes.
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5. Recruitment and Retention

5.1 Introduction

Although there are signs that social work is becoming more attractive to new entrants, and there have been some recent successful government campaigns, recruitment of children’s social workers appears to be a problem everywhere. In 2005, 69% of local authorities in England indicated recruitment difficulties with children’s social workers (Adult, Children and Young People Local Authority Social Care Workforce Survey, Report 2005). This report also showed a 20% increase in recruitment difficulties from 2001 to 2005.

Retention difficulties were less common although more than half of local authorities in the survey stated that they had problems with retention in 2005, and again there was a marked increase since 2001. Voluntary organisations indicated that they have fewer problems with recruitment and retention.

Reasons given for these difficulties included image, pay and inadequate management support. Another cause cited was frustration with the lack of resources to perform the job effectively, either because caseloads were too large or because the threshold for provision of a service was so high that professionals felt unable to provide appropriate intervention. Recruitment would be helped by more traineeships, bursaries and a range of recruitment campaigns.

5.2 Recruitment campaign

There was a strong feeling from all submissions that a high profile recruitment campaign is needed, similar to that which has recently been undertaken for teachers. It was also repeatedly stated that a television drama, documentary or soap opera could result in a more positive impression of social work and would encourage more people to apply.

Recruitment from people already working in social care including volunteers, and from those who had been through the care system, were also recommended by several service user organisations. Shaping our Lives wrote that:

‘Service users also value the shared understanding that they believe comes from direct experience of using social work and social care services. They argue for this to be seen as a positive in the recruitment and training of new social workers. They also highlight continuing barriers standing in the way

of service users becoming social workers on equal terms with non-service users and call for these to be removed.’

The Who Cares Trust mentioned in their submission that people who had a previous suitable career and experience should be fast tracked. School-Home Support stated that recruitment should be targeted ‘at the over 30s who are looking for more meaningful work, have loads of life experience and would provide a more stable workforce’. Other submissions commented that maturity was an important attribute to cope with the complex and emotional nature of social work particularly child protection. The False Allegations Support Organisation (FASO) wrote that ‘a youngster straight from college has no conception of the diversity of family life and what may or may not be normal’. The 2005 report ‘Adult, Children and Young People Local Authority Social Care Workforce Survey’ indicated that 69% of children’s social workers were aged 25-49 years old with 25% aged between 50-59 years old. Only 2% were aged 16-24 years old. This indicates that most social workers do in fact have a suitable level of maturity.

The introduction of the new social work degree course has been seen as significant in improving the quality and standard of social workers entering the profession. CAFCASS wrote that recruitment is more buoyant and the honours degree has added to both the real and perceived professionalism of social work.

It has been an increasingly popular degree. The GSCC wrote:

‘There was an increase of over a third in the numbers coming into social work training between 2000-2003, when the new degree was introduced. By 2005 the number entering training was 5,553. In 2006, social work entered the top 10 degree subjects ranked by the number of entrants. The introduction of the new scheme of bursaries paid to social work students and administered by the GSCC has helped in recruitment to the profession and retention through training.’

This indicates that recruitment into social work may be improving. It is now important to ensure that this trend continues and to retain trained social workers.

5.3 Relevant experience of potential social workers

There was support for a system that would encourage people with relevant experience either as a service user or support worker to train as a social worker.

The NSPCC wrote that there should be more flexible routes into social work with the greater use of Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL), and A National Voice stated that not only should service users have ‘direct involvement in the degree course’ but should also be encouraged to become social workers themselves. This will depend on ability to meet the honours degree requirements and support may be needed for those without mainstream qualifications to acquire the necessary study skills and background learning.

UNISON mentioned that the new Open University pathway scheme has been launched with much enthusiasm, but that employers must allow protected time for employees who want to follow the work-based routes to social work and post-qualifying training.

Community Service Volunteers (CSV) believes that a period of full time voluntary service should be a key requirement for social work training. CSV provides opportunities for those who are exploring a career in the social care field to work alongside social workers and other care workers.

5.4 Pay and rewards

The CSCI publication ‘The State of Social Care’ points out that social workers are among the poorest paid professionals in the UK. There is a particular problem in London and the South East where housing and living costs are extremely high.

Pay scales and bonuses are used to attract staff in areas where there are recruitment problems, but this can cause difficulties in itself. The NSPCC wrote that a national pay scale should be introduced to stop staff from moving around for better pay, and the LGA also stated that there should be ‘a model of salary grading and significant investment in salaries’. However, the voluntary agency managers who were interviewed indicated that they did not pay significantly more than local authorities and UNISON stated that ‘local authority pay structures exert a high degree of influence on pay arrangements in the private and voluntary sectors’. Coram Family wrote that ‘we are able to attract and retain high quality staff, despite not being able to fully match financial and other conditions of service benefits available in the public sector’.

The NSPCC mentioned in their submission that there is a problem with difference in pay and rewards in multi-disciplinary teams.

‘A reward strategy backed up with sufficient resources is needed. Such a strategy must include greater harmonisation of pay and reward across the children’s workforce and transferability of pensions across professions and

between the statutory, private and voluntary sectors. In our experience differences in rewards can be a major stumbling block in multi-disciplinary teams and can affect mobility.’

ADCS wrote that there must be ‘parity of salary with other equivalent groups e.g. NHS, Education and Police’.

5.5 Retention and turnover of staff

The turnover of social workers appeared to be an issue everywhere. In 2005, 56% of local authorities found it difficult or very difficult to retain staff in the last 12 months (Adult, Children and Young People Local Authority Social Care Workforce Survey Report 2005). There were many comments about the problems in London where there are frequent changes of social worker during an average legal case. Social workers mentioned that this lack of continuity was a source of frustration for both the social worker and the child, parent and carers. Some mentioned that agency work is attractive because it pays more for short term contracts, but others considered it caused problems because there is no loyalty to a particular organisation. CAFCASS pointed out that the move towards outsourcing of former local authority social work projects and schemes over the last ten years has meant that some good social workers have preferred to move to these projects rather than stay involved in the complex day to day cases which the local authorities undertake.

There was some recognition that high turnover figures can be due to large numbers of new recruits who may not have settled into the community. In addition there are a number of foreign temporary social workers employed on temporary contracts because of the shortage of UK trained social workers. In addition, Professor Ward wrote that where ‘the age of the workforce is higher, the turnover rate is lower’.

Welcare stated that the ‘hot desking’ system in some offices is adding to social workers’ stress. While it is a cost effective use of space while workers are out on home visits, it also ‘cuts social workers off from support networks of their colleagues, isolates them and prevents them sharing knowledge and input/cover of each others’ cases’.

5.6 Heavy caseloads and stress

Difficulties in retention of staff were not only attributed to levels of pay but to other factors too. The pressure of large caseloads in local authorities was seen as a major reason for social workers leaving the profession or moving to another local authority or a voluntary or private agency. Many social workers in local authorities have caseloads which are all at tiers three and

four (heavy and stressful cases). A vicious circle is created in which heavy case loads in local authorities lead to increased stress levels and low morale which leads to social workers leaving the local authorities or taking sick leave, leaving existing social workers with increased caseloads and pressure. It also makes recruitment harder.

Advance Children’s Services wrote that social workers join agencies not ‘just to get the salary they deserve but to have the right to leave the post at short notice when they become dissatisfied with the job or they become overburdened’.

Local authorities with better funding appear to have sustainable mixed caseloads and a better retention rate. The majority of respondents to the Commission were clear that leaving only the statutory roles with local authorities and outsourcing the preventative aspect of social work would lead to further difficulties in recruitment and retention in local authorities.

5.7 Quality of leadership

A crucial factor in the retention of staff was the quality of the leadership, management and support that social workers receive. The vicious cycle of large stressful caseloads and turnover of staff mentioned above means that managers often have to take on caseloads themselves rather than managing their front line social workers. Buckinghamshire County Council wrote:

‘The most common reason cited by staff leaving the organisation – as in most organisations – is their line manager. Currently too many managers are having to work on operational issues as a result of staffing pressures rather than managing their teams which affects the quality of supervision and support that they are able to offer.’

CAFCASS stated in their interview that social work would be a more attractive career option if social workers could be sure of a manager who could give effective supervision and good advice particularly when working with hostile clients. It also helped if there was a reasonably resourced and strong team with no internal conflict. CAFCASS also commented that if social workers are working in a good team, other factors such as pay and conditions are less important.

Many of the voluntary and private organisations which contributed to the Commission commented on how managers in their organisations were able to give the right support and appropriate varied caseloads to their social workers, and cited this as key to retention and job satisfaction within their organisations.

Welcare commented in their submission that many of the decisions regarding social workers ‘come from managers, councillors and government without any consultation or real knowledge of their role and profession’. The London Borough of Barnet has successfully turned this around by involving all the members of the department in a strategy to improve the social care workforce and create better outcomes for children. This has meant that Barnet has reduced the turnover of staff by investing in training and supporting ‘home grown’ social workers.

5.8 High thresholds for the provision of a local authority social work service

There was frustration with the high thresholds set before the provision of a child and family service was offered. This makes it difficult to achieve positive change and reduces the job satisfaction that goes with success. Lack of funding for social workers to provide appropriate services and perform their roles with clients to a high enough standard was also considered to be contributing to social workers leaving the profession. Unity Justice wrote that ‘money could be an impact on the difficulties with the job, the responsibilities and overall way social workers are thought of can make the job not worthwhile’.

UNISON wrote:

‘Social workers are leaving social work because of the increasing frustration of carrying out assessments of need which cannot be met because of local authorities’ increasing eligibility rationing. They find themselves at the front-line of this crisis and it is having a devastating impact on morale.’

5.9 Career structure

The career structure of social work means that social workers have to move into management rather than remaining as experienced social workers on the front line. There was unanimous support from witnesses for the widespread establishment of the senior practitioner or consultant role which would retain experienced social workers, who do not want to go into management, on the front line. The structure, role and pay of such posts would have to be clearly defined. The NSPCC wrote that:

‘There is a need to develop a social work career path that would avoid social workers being regarded as the bottom rung of a long career ladder that is primarily focused on management skills. If social workers could progress to senior practice and even principal/consultant roles it would retain top-quality staff and build an important reservoir of skills and knowledge. The

involvement of these career practitioners in teaching and research would also enhance the reputation of the social worker role.’

There are concerns that the increased emphasis given in some recent government reports on management skills rather than advanced social work practice skills could lead to expenditure on a tranche of senior staff with management qualifications but no professional social work qualifications. This has attracted criticism in the NHS.

There are examples of some local authorities which are beginning to promote the senior practitioner structure and this should become widespread practice.

5.10 Summary

- There is a need for a good high profile recruitment campaign.
- It is important for those who want to enter social work to be required to show some level of experience and commitment before applying. This could be achieved through voluntary work, through paid employment in a social care, health or education setting, or through experience as a service user or carer.
- Pay scales and bonuses are being used to attract social workers in some areas where there is difficulty in recruiting and there was general agreement that social workers’ pay is too low and should be comparable to that of experienced teachers, nurses and other public sector workers with similar levels of education and experience.
- Some witnesses argued for the continuation of agreed national scales to avoid ‘poaching’ and decrease the problems resulting from lack of continuity. There was agreement that senior practitioners should be rewarded for remaining in direct practice by higher pay scales. The evidence on whether the independent sector was able to recruit more easily by higher pay was mixed. Some independent sector workers are paid more than local authority staff, but some are paid less. There was agreement that pay itself was not the major motivator for social workers moving out of the statutory sector.
- More important than pay to the retention of newly qualified as well as experienced social workers are other considerations: keeping caseloads at a reasonable level; avoiding unnecessary bureaucracy; providing high quality support and supervision at team leader level; avoiding frustration at the lack of resources to meet client need and

for face-to-face practice; ensuring that career structures allow those who wish it to remain in direct practice.

- The role of senior practitioner or consultant would give experienced social workers an alternative career path and keep their valuable skills on the front line.
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6. Management, work priorities and effectiveness

Management

6.1 Introduction

There are several issues concerning leadership and management which were highlighted to the Commission. The quality of management, especially at team leader level, is crucial to the effectiveness and retention of social workers and outcomes and success for children and families. Social work is very demanding and when mistakes are made the social worker is often identified as the scapegoat although a team of other professionals has been involved. All the submissions and witnesses commented that good support and case work supervision were essential in organising caseloads and in decision making.

6.2 Clear lines of accountability

Lines of accountability must be clear. Individual social workers are often blamed when things go wrong while other members of the team escape censure. The Children Act 2004 states that each children’s service authority in England must establish a Local Safeguarding Children Board for their area which would include representatives from the authority and all relevant partners of the authority such as police, probation, health authority, the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service and secure training establishments. The Director of Children’s Services has the ultimate safeguarding responsibility and the statutory lead member on the council holds the director to account.

These lines of accountability should be in place to provide support for social workers and prevent individuals from becoming the scapegoat when things go wrong. At the same time it is important for the public to understand the balance between doing everything possible to prevent child abuse, and the reality that it is not possible to eliminate it – just as with other serious crimes such as murder, there will be individuals who will commit these offences in the privacy of their own homes, and in most cases it is not necessary to find a professional to blame.

The NSPCC wrote that

‘Lord Laming’s emphasis on clear lines of accountability was right, however we also need to move away from the culture which suggests there must be someone to blame when tragedies occur. This obstructs the possibility of developing public understanding of how and why children are maltreated

and the possibility of addressing the social issues and attitudes that underlie much abuse and make children vulnerable.’

Most submissions agreed that social workers were already well regulated and, in some cases, over-managed which was preventing them from taking the initiative. However, there is consensus that managers should be there to provide support for decision making and that the whole team should be accountable. This is seen as particularly important in multi-agency teams.

6.3 Managerial support (including professional leadership and consultation)

There was concern about the lack of case supervision and support from managers for front line workers which means that relatively inexperienced social workers are left to carry too much responsibility. In local authorities this has been a resource issue when the shortage of social workers has meant that managers have had to perform front line tasks as well as managing teams. BAAF wrote:

‘Social work organisations do need to ensure that they have effective professional support systems in place for front line staff. This requires more than ensuring organisational accountability but the recognition of the particular demands of the social work task and the impact that this has on front line workers.’

Dame Denise Platt of the CSCI has recommended in The Status of Social Care in England the creation of a Skills Academy to develop skills in leadership, commissioning and management across the whole social care sector. SCIE stated in the interview that managers have to be able to match the amount and type of work with the skills and ability of the social worker. This judgement requires considerable skill and training.

6.4 Workforce strategies and planning

CSCI were concerned that many local authorities do not have good workforce strategies and that those that exist are mostly reactive rather than looking at long term planning. Successful local authorities are ones which have long term strategies and develop their own social workers, including those who are finding career development routes into social work. Local recruitment campaigns to attract experienced people who will stay within the local community and provide continuity are important.

Workforce strategies must also provide an organisational structure to develop the skills to support and supervise social workers in the field, thereby making the job less stressful and more enjoyable.

6.5 Multi-agency management

There are some concerns that working in multi-disciplinary teams means that some managers of social workers may not be social workers themselves. As BAAF stated in the interview:

‘Some social workers do not have managers who have a social work background. This is a problem because it would not happen in other professions. You would not find a medical consultant in one field supervising in another medical field. Other professionals have a firmer grip on their knowledge and skills and social workers need to have the same. There are specific issues about social work practice and there are situations where they need proper supervision from people who understand and have experience in that work.’

Managers are also responsible for developing strategies for effective inter-agency working. SCIE states that

‘the two main blocks to more effective inter-agency working are the failings at board, senior and middle management levels to develop effective, or even functioning, inter-agency strategies, and the separatism built into the education and training of many professionals, particularly those in the NHS.’

UNISON also commented that there should be clear standards for interagency co-operation and protocols for dealing with differences of professional opinion between workers of different agencies. Dr Gall wrote that ‘inter-agency work has been slow in its take-up on the ground’ and that ‘joint funding is a great move forward but wrangling about who put in what have delayed decisions for children’.

These comments among others suggest that there should be more inter-agency management training and clear guidelines ensuring that each discipline enjoys equal respect for its knowledge, skills and professional judgements. There is also a need for one lead professional, identified in consultation with the child and family and in the light of their particular needs, to ensure that the case is appropriately prioritised and that a timetable is in place for assessment, intervention and review.

6.6 The use of volunteers

According to CSV there are 227,000 volunteers working in social care and some of them are exploring the possibility of a career in social work, particularly those aged 18-25. Some local authorities and most voluntary

child care organisations have recruited and trained volunteers to work under the supervision of social workers or specialist volunteer co-ordinators to relieve the pressure on parents, which has improved the lives of families and prevented the need for further intervention. Home Start and Parentline Plus are the best known specialist organisations but there are many similar local organisations or national organisations with local branches.

In their interview, CSV stated that California had a state-wide volunteer service in which young volunteers are linked up to help families, and that this has reduced child protection referrals by 80%. (It should be noted that there is very poor availability of statutory family support in California, making it very different from the UK.)

Social workers need appropriate training and support in order to match volunteers to families or children and use them effectively, but they can relieve the pressures on social workers and give them time to concentrate on the professional tasks of assessment and direct social work intervention, where needed.

6.7 Summary

There was general agreement on the following points:

- There must be clear lines of accountability.
- Due to lack of resources, many managers have to take on caseloads rather than managing and supporting front line social workers.
- Local authorities need to develop long term strategies and good organisational structures for social work recruitment in their areas, and for the supervision and support of both newly qualified and experienced social workers.
- More work needs to be done to develop the successful management of effective multi-agency working.
- The use of volunteers should be welcomed and carefully managed.

Work priorities

6.8 Introduction

Two themes were mentioned by most submissions and interviewees concerning work priorities. The first was that many local authority social

workers have high workloads which are unsustainable and lead to stress, absence through sickness and therefore reduced contact with clients. The lack of continuity and accessibility of social workers was mentioned by service users and blamed on the overloading of work. The second theme was that social workers spend too much time on administration rather than on contact with clients or reflection and case analysis.

High caseloads mean that most work undertaken by local authority social workers is emergency child protection and there is not enough time for preventative work or therapeutic work after children have been traumatised. Some of the voluntary organisations suggested that the family support roles should be taken on by other services working in the community, leaving the local authority with the roles required by statute. However, other witnesses strongly opposed this option and considered that it would contribute to increased stress and higher turnover of local authority social workers.

6.9 Variations in caseloads

At present there are wide variations in both the size and content of caseloads between local authorities. This has an impact on retention of staff in some areas, because they move to other better funded local authorities or agencies which provide a less stressful environment. The LGA commented during the interview that ‘social workers need a range of activities and tasks in their caseloads’. Welcare mentioned in their submission that student social workers ‘see the voluntary sector as the place for creative and enabling social work practice. Often local authorities only allocate the heavy end work which makes caseloads more onerous and more process driven’. The Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea wrote that they believed that:

‘High standards of casework require low caseloads. We believe that the consistently excellent external evaluations of Kensington and Chelsea and high levels of user satisfaction in part reflect low caseloads compared to other areas.’

Voluntary and private organisations stated that they attract staff because their workloads are sustainable and varied. Many respondents wrote that lower case loads would enable relationships to be built with service users, would bring more job satisfaction, and would help change the lives of children, parents and other carers. Looked after children particularly value the continuity provided by having one social worker over time, and it was a big issue in the discussion groups for the Children’s Rights Director for England’s 2006 survey of children and young people.

One social worker wrote that:

‘Lesser case loads would enable you to really build relationships with service users and give them the time that they have a right to. This I believe would lead to greater job satisfaction and would bring about more change. A balance of less paperwork and more direct work with service users would also lead to more job satisfaction.’

Many of the Government initiatives such as Sure Start have been aimed at preventative work and at reducing the numbers of referrals to social services. The School-Home Support charity wrote:

‘Services such as School-Home Support who work in schools and other settings that are accessed regularly by children, young people and families, can provide early identification of problems and offer strategies to address the problems. This can and does obviate the need for social work intervention at a later date, so reducing case loads.’

6.10 Bureaucracy and administration

Nearly all respondents stated that while they could see the need for accountability through careful record keeping, it was taking a disproportionate amount of social workers’ time. The GSCC wrote that some social workers are spending at least 60-70% of their time on administrative work as opposed to client contact. Much of this time is spent filling in forms to ensure accountability rather than working with the family. The London Borough of Sutton pointed out that 20 years ago only 30% of a social worker’s time was spent on paperwork. IT systems vary between each local authority which means that social workers moving to another local authority have to learn a new system.

SCIE mentioned in the interview that field social work services in Scotland have been reorganised so that teams are now based around the task or family with social workers in the leadership role. This structure provides an appropriate role for the social worker who is supported by other workers including administrative staff. The service provided to each family is related to skills levels and the needs of the family. By using the social care workers and administrative staff effectively, this allows the social workers more time to concentrate on doing the job they are trained for.

6.11 Interagency working

Social workers are recognised to be good at liaising with other professional and government bodies when helping clients and are a crucial part of inter-agency working. Partnerships with a range of professional colleagues are vital particularly with the NHS at every level. Integrated services require an

integrated approach to strategy, commissioning and delivery. This is particularly important for vulnerable and disadvantaged children and young people with a range of needs and inequalities which require a joined up approach.

However, there are some criticisms that the excessive caseloads often carried by social workers affect the quality of their relationships with other professionals and cause a lack of continuity from the client’s perspective.

The Metropolitan Police mentioned in the interview that although generally police officers and social workers work well together, there is sometimes a lack of trust on the part of social workers, who are concerned that information shared may not be used appropriately.

One social worker commented that she thought that communication and understanding between professionals was getting worse, particularly as other professions had a lack of understanding of how families interact. She also stated that technology seems to be increasingly seen as ‘the answer’ to problems with interagency work, with core forms for every profession driving the assessments rather than the other way round. This often leads to inflexibility as every family is different.

Some local authorities are developing a range of joint approaches particularly with Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) and where multi-disciplinary teams are working closely with families. Hampshire County Council’s children’s services are working closely with the Hampshire Primary Health Care Trust (PCT) to develop a joint strategy for early intervention. The PCT in Kensington and Chelsea has delegated ‘management of its children’s community healthcare services to the Council’ so that ‘education, social care, youth and community health services for children will all be managed together, under the leadership of the Director of Children’s Services’.

6.12 Role and deployment of a social worker

There appears to be some uncertainty about the roles and tasks of social workers and a need to reassess how they should be deployed. The Commission welcomes the GSCC’s 2007 consultation on the ‘Roles and Tasks of Social Work in England’ and hopes that it will enable social workers to articulate their role more clearly. The Commission hopes that its findings will help with recruitment campaigns and help shape the future of social work education and training.

Many witnesses and submissions commented that social work is effective when time is spent on preventative work trying to keep families together

before it becomes necessary for children to be taken into care but, at present, not enough time or resources are being spent in this role.

When children have been harmed, or families have suffered the impact of trauma, and in cases where the problems are especially complex, social workers are needed both to co-ordinate the services provided and to provide a direct casework service to children and parents. This is especially so when maltreated children need to come into care.

A social worker from Hounslow wrote:

‘The balance for early intervention and prevention has been tipped in favour of the voluntary sector, with all funding being directed towards them leaving Children’s Services with the child protection and looked after children. In my view Children’s Services are best placed to safely manage child protection and looked after children, however, we should be provided with a significant proportion of early intervention and prevention funding in order to ensure we are well placed to meet the challenges of Children Act 2004.’

Referring to the role of local authority social workers, the London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham wrote:

‘The main role of social work in local authorities (is) essentially being an agent of the state. Until that is properly recognised, social workers trained for that, and clear about the role, the way forward for social work remains uncertain.’

The LGA mentioned in the interview that there is an absence of debate about the role of the social worker, while resource constraints mean that social work in local authorities is limited to the regulatory function. The LGA believes that Government should be clearer about the role of social workers and processes they follow, to enable a more effective workforce.

The Government Green Paper ‘Care Matters’ talks about leaving the regulatory role with local authorities and commissioning the voluntary and private sector to take on the preventative roles and work with children in care. Many of the submissions and interviews were unhappy about this split. Not only would it leave social workers in local authorities with only the more complex and stressful role of child protection but it would not provide continuity for the child and family. It is also important to consider the role of the corporate parent which places ultimate responsibility for the welfare of the child or young person with the local authority.

UNISON wrote in their response to the Green Paper:

‘The proposal fragments the child’s journey through the care system and works against continuity – in effect it means that a local authority social worker would hand over a child to new staff within a private practice at the conclusion of care proceedings. Furthermore the child may have to be handed back to local authority teams if they come out of care again. Lines of accountability and the coherence of the “corporate parent” role would be undermined.’

Coram Family pointed out that there must be sufficient investment in early intervention through the statutory services, alongside diversification of roles for local authority social workers, because if local authorities are left with only the child protection role social workers will be reluctant to continue working in local authorities, leaving much of the country without a service.

6.13 Lack of continuity for service users

The lack of continuity and accessibility of the social worker was bought up by service users. The Oxford Parent-Infant Project commented that ‘clients are frequently moved from one social worker to another with little realisation of the impact on them’. Several service users mentioned that they had many social workers and would like a permanent one with whom they could build a relationship. Other witnesses talked about the impact on the child who has to repeat their case history each time a new social worker is assigned to them. One carer commented:

‘The young person in my care was traumatised by his experiences and yet he was required over and over again to repeat his story and reasons for not wanting to return to certain areas of his life to every social worker (six in all). It didn’t matter how many times he explained, they all still asked the same questions or arranged the very opposite of what he had asked, they appeared totally insensitive or stupid to the damage they were impounding on, it appeared that not one had taken his feelings and reasons into account or read up on his history and knew what they were dealing with.’

The Children’s Rights Director for England commented in his interview that children and young people would like to be able to choose their social worker which would make them feel some ownership of the relationship and more investment in making it positive. His report also pointed out that children and young people would like the opportunity to change their social worker if the relationship was not working.

CAFCASS pointed out in the interview that employing larger numbers of agency staff has been destructive to practitioner and team continuity in recent years with the agency social workers being used to fill short gaps. CAFCASS has experienced problems with independent and agency social

workers walking away from jobs if they get a case they don’t like. Service users in the Children’s Rights Director’s 2006 report equated too many locums with a bad social work service.

6.14 Lack of continuity and skills in court

The excessive caseloads and lack of continuity become apparent in the courts where there can be frequent changes of social worker during a case. Nearly all lawyers and judges who were interviewed or who submitted reports mentioned that it was rare to see the same social worker from the beginning to end of a case particularly in London.

Family court lawyer Helen Grant wrote:

‘It is rare in an average legal case that the original social worker is still in post at a final hearing; indeed it often the third or fourth allocated social worker.’

Judge Nicholas Crichton stated that often social workers turned up to court unprepared without ‘careful and thoughtful analyses or recommendations’. He states:

‘In thirty-five years I believe that the quality of social work has deteriorated as a result of persistent under-funding of social work.’

The lack of experience of report writing and court procedure was also mentioned by many of the submissions and witnesses. The lack of confidence and credibility of social workers can be seen in the heavy reliance on expert witnesses in court proceedings, some of whom are less knowledgeable about the case than the social worker.

6.15 Summary

There was general agreement on the following points:

- Social workers will benefit from greater clarity about their roles and tasks. This would lead to greater self confidence in articulating what they have to offer and more weight given by others to their skills and professional opinions.
- Social workers are more effective, more satisfied with their work and more likely to stay in the work if they have sustainable and varied caseloads.

- Bureaucracy has taken an increasing amount of time and prevents social workers from spending sufficient time with clients.
- Local authority social workers do not have enough time to spend on preventative work or working directly with children and families to help alleviate the impact of traumatic events.
- There is a lack of continuity of social workers within cases. This harms their relationship with children, parents and carers and also with other professionals.
- Social workers need to have confidence and credibility when working in multi-disciplinary teams and in court.
- The Commission discussed the respective roles of social workers in the local authority and independent sectors which also included the proposals for independent social work practices likely to be included in the forthcoming legislation on children in the care system. In the absence of published details or the findings from the proposed pilots it is hard to form a view at this stage. Some members of the Commission expressed concerns that any evaluation should be on the basis of a fair comparison with other well-funded alternative approaches whilst others speculated that such practices could offer the possibility of exercising clear, independent, professional autonomy and accountability to social workers which would help to enhance their status. The Commission therefore took no collective view at this stage.

Effectiveness

6.16 Introduction

As has been said, there was a general consensus and strong feeling that not enough preventative work takes place. The lack of resources means that social work is mostly reactive and social workers can only concentrate on the most severe cases. They can only deal with a fraction of the referrals they receive, prioritising cases is a necessity, and intervention does not happen until crisis point.

Social workers have too little time to spend with clients and there is a lack of continuity of social workers in some areas. This was mentioned by all agencies working with social workers.

The Skills for Care Council wrote that service users report that the ‘quality of the service they receive is often dependent on the quality of the worker providing the service’. Children and young people who responded to the Children’s Rights Director’s Report had mostly positive views about the effectiveness of their personal social worker but recognised the difficult situations and limitations the social worker had to work with. The report also commented that different councils had different rules which can seem very unfair to young people who realise that other councils are giving ‘very different levels of support or payment for the same things’.

6.17 Specialist or generic social work practice

The majority of respondents felt that the generic practice of social workers was fundamental to the profession’s effectiveness since social workers must be able to work effectively with all family members and with the full range of problems. The Law Society wrote:

‘The need to invoke child protection procedures is but one aspect of the multi-faceted problems currently facing society as a result of many issues, including but not limited to, poverty, domestic and substance abuse and unprecedented levels of relationship breakdown. In solicitors’ experience, many more children are living in families where there are complex and multiple problems.’

The Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea mentioned that ‘there is a real risk that poor communication between adults’ and children’s services becomes an increasing problem in complex family situations where a holistic approach is necessary. Little has been done nationally to address this problem to date.’

While there was a strong view that social work should remain broad and not divide into two completely separate professional streams, there was also recognition that there had to be an element of specialist working, and therefore specialist training due to the different nature and complexity of each strand of social work.

A National Voice commented that ‘amongst young people in particular, there is strong sense of social workers’ misunderstanding of the basic emotional make-up of children in care’ suggesting that social workers need more training in this area to be effective.

6.18 Communication with children and the family

Communication was one of the important issues mentioned by the service users, support groups and looked after children. Children and young people feel that it is very important to be able to contact their social worker and commented on the difficulty of getting hold of them. ‘Being able to telephone your social worker was something many young people told us was important to them’ (Children’s Rights Director in his 2006 report), and this was also mentioned by carers and parents.

The lack of appropriate communication and information for parents, some of whom have their own needs, about what is happening is also an issue. Grandparents and other members of the extended family who could help also feel excluded. The feeling of secrecy within the social services departments and courts was mentioned by several submissions. Children and young people also think that it is important that they are told the whole truth so they can prepare themselves and talk about it.

The Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People (NICCY) wrote in an overview report that young people

‘spoke very positively of their social worker, stating that they made every effort to keep them informed, explain things to them and take on board their views and wishes. The majority of young people were, however, less positive overall, with several stating that although their social worker did try to engage with them, they didn’t see them as often as they should. Several also stated that, at times, they had difficulty contacting their social worker when they needed them.’

A National Voice believes that involving young people at all levels of service delivery is important. Other witnesses mentioned that social workers need to be better at providing information and empowering people to solve their own problems through commissioning and co-ordinating packages of care.

Shaping our Lives stated that ‘service users highlighted the importance of the relationship’ and there were a ‘range of valued personal qualities’ which were important including ‘warmth, respect, being non-judgemental, listening, treating people with equality, being trustworthy, openness and honesty, reliability and communicating well’.

It was reported by several people that children and young people appreciated continuity with a social worker and one that took an interest in their development over time even after they had ceased to be responsible for them.

6.19 Keeping children in the family

Some of the submissions came from support organisations representing the extended family such as grandparents who may have been denied contact with their grandchildren or the opportunity to bring them up where the parents are unable to. The Grandparents Action Group UK wrote that sometimes grandparents’ complaints are reported back to the parents which often makes things worse and can mean that parents prevent contact with their grandchildren. They may not report abuse because they do not trust social workers.

In some cases Grandparents would like to be able to bring up their grandchild rather than see them go into care. This can be difficult financially to start with because of lack of money to challenge the system and have representation in court. The Grandparents Action Group UK suggested that grandparents could get the same financial help that foster parents receive.

The Chief Social Worker of New Zealand stated that 45% of placements in New Zealand are kinship placements and they are more generous financially to kinship carers depending on how they are classified. This contrasts with this country where only 1% of kinship placements are initiated by social workers. There are ongoing studies to look into the efficacy of kinship placements but it has meant that in New Zealand there are fewer adoptions, with half of all adoptions international.

6.20 Lack of resources

Most people become social workers to improve people’s lives but find work frustrating because of the lack of resources, including time, which means that their effectiveness is hampered.

The time resource issue is a problem because of the long term nature of social work which requires continuity to be effective. Many organisations mentioned that early intervention was essential to the effectiveness of social work and could prevent the child from entering the care system. There are few ‘quick fixes’ in social work and a relationship with the child and family over time is seen as the primary contributor to an effective outcome. The lack of funding has meant that local authorities only have money for expensive emergency cases which may have been prevented if the case had been sorted earlier.

The Unity Injustice submission stated:

‘What is worst about social work is its ‘reactive’ nature only intervening in a restrictive way where they believe it is necessary, and often their interventions of such severe nature is not required. Too little is done proactively. Decisions are made too early, and many families feel the worker

has already made up their mind before they even take forward the investigation or complete their assessment.’

School-Home Support wrote:

‘In our experience, social workers do not have sufficient capacity to be able to intervene early. Most spend their time dealing with crises.’

The Who Cares Trust completed a project ‘The Journey Home: how Children’s Services can Support the Reunification of Children with their Families’ in November 2006, which found that:

‘The overriding message from this work was the failure of the system to support families whilst their children were in care, a lack of planning and preparation about reunification, and an almost total lack of support for the family once the child had returned.’

6.21 Aversion to risk

The aversion to risk of managers, and its impact on social work decision making, were mentioned in several submissions and interviews. Failures highlighted in well publicised cases have meant that social workers are fearful of being identified with the next public scandal and there is pressure on local authorities by insurers to minimise the risk of legal action.

The organisation Families Anti-Social Services Inquiry Team (FASSIT) wrote that from their point of view:

‘Social services departments (SSDs) have a well known policy of ‘zero-risk-management’, that is to say that they will not even consider options that attempt to assess real risk (as opposed to inferred) and that working in an organisation that is exposed regularly to “extreme cases” of abuse or neglect SSDs are sensitised (or paranoid) and thus focus down on negative rather than positive factors within a family.’

In court, a heavy reliance on other experts and specialist reports, to back up social workers’ recommendations, can delay court proceedings. This at times impacts on the professional assertiveness and confidence of the social worker who may hesitate to make firm recommendations to the judge.

Judge Nicholas Crichton wrote:

‘I also believe that many social workers are scared to exercise balanced discretion. The sequence of cases involving Maria Colwell, Tyra Henry, Jasmine Beckford and Victoria Climbié (and several in between) has led to

such vituperative media criticism of the work of social workers that often their first thought is to protect their own backs. This is not conducive to good social work. As a result of these issues social work departments develop “policies” which, when slavishly adhered to, can impede good social work practice.’

Anthony Kirk QC stated in his interview that if social workers were left alone with their own thoughts they would be able to carry out their job more successfully.

Marie Connolly, the Chief Social Worker of New Zealand commented that in the 1990s New Zealand’s social workers were ‘very risk averse’ until they reassessed the system in 2000 and introduced three imperatives which included family decision making and support, along with the safety of the child. This new approach has improved social work practice and has led to a more effective system.

The risk-averse nature of social work was also noticed by children and young people who commented in the Children’s Rights Director’s report that often social workers would not allow looked after children to take ‘even reasonable risk that many other people were allowed to take’ and often social workers insisted on ‘special permission from the council’ for trips or to stay overnight with friends. Children felt they were missing out on treats ‘that other young people went on, just because you were looked after by the council’.

6.22 Effectiveness of interagency working

Inter-agency working performs well where it has grown organically with proper consultation rather than being structured from the top down. Clear roles are required for the lead professional and other members of the team. The Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea commented:

‘Inter-agency working and integration has great potential to improve services from the users’ point of view, with the potential for a much more seamless service. However, with the demise of traditional social services departments it is harder for social work to retain its distinctive professional identity.’

Leicestershire County Council mentioned that there are concerns that ‘social care values are subsumed in the NHS (medical model) which many social workers feel is the case and a “threat” to integration.’

A National Voice agreed that

‘Interagency working has meant that there are more options available for the social worker to signpost or refer easily but more co-ordination in general and involvement from useful charitable organisations (for instance ANV, mental health charities etc.) need to occur. The current provisions and links for mental health services are not sufficient and therefore more provisions and links need to be made.’

An example of effective interagency working using Local Area Agreements has been seen in Hampshire. Hampshire County Council’s Children’s Services have been working closely with Hampshire Primary Care Trust (PCT) and have created a greater integration of service functions and joint working at all levels in the system including jointly funded strategy and commissioning posts. Along with joint strategies with Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services this has proved to be effective in improving services for young people and providing early and targeted intervention.

6.23 Working in the community

There was a strong feeling among organisations and service user groups that social workers should be working in the community not just in local authority offices. This was summed up by Advance Children’s Services:

‘To be more effective social workers need to be in the heart of their community as facilitators and communicators rather than as a social police force. Social workers need to be in places such as schools developing relationships with parents in the community and with the parents of the future. They should be supporting the training and development of the community such as parenting courses, equal opportunities and diversity training and meet unique individual needs of the community.’

Service user groups and other professionals giving evidence considered that it is important that all services are accessible and provided in an environment that is not threatening for users as some are worried about the control aspects of social services.

The Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea wrote that they had established a Health Link team with social workers based in the Chelsea and Westminster Hospital working with midwives and health visitors to help vulnerable families before the birth of a child, maintaining continuity when the child is born and afterwards back in the community.

6.24 Summary

There was general agreement that:

- Social workers are more effective if they are generically trained so they can work with the whole family.
 - There is room for improvement in social workers’ communication with children and families.
 - A lack of resources for social work hampers its effectiveness.
 - Social workers and their managers have developed an aversion to risk because of the way in which failures have been publicised.
 - Interagency working can work well.
 - Social workers should be integrated and working in community settings.
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Comments and Recommendations

7. Role

7.1 Comments

The panel recognises and applauds the immensely important role that social workers perform in our society.

Social workers are at the coalface of society with an increasing proportion of the population suffering family and psychological breakdown at every age. It is clear that the complex nature of social work, which involves working with children in a family setting, means that their role cannot be confined to dealing solely with either adults or children. The generic nature of social work is crucial to working with families.

Integrated services are now commonplace and the importance of multi-agency working should be reflected in the training and work of all professionals to ensure that there is an integrated approach to strategy, commissioning and delivery.

There is a role for social workers out in the community, attached to schools, GP surgeries, health clinics, Citizens Advice Bureaux and so on, as well as in local authority adults’ and children’s services.

The panel acknowledges that social work needs to refocus on preventative work with children and families rather than reactive intervention. It is recognised that early intervention is preferable and can often be cost effective. The panel realises that the lack of preventative work is a function of limited time and resources and recommends that further government investment is targeted more effectively to enable social workers to be proactive and supported in finding solutions rather than crisis management.

The panel would like to see the role of senior practitioner become widespread so that experienced social workers are able to stay at the front line rather than moving into management to further their career. The role of senior practitioner would mean continuity of social worker for some families and could provide mentors for newly qualified and inexperienced social workers.

The panel strongly welcomes the work commissioned by the Department of Health and led by the GSCC to produce a statement clarifying the role and tasks of social workers in today’s society. We hope that it will include some investigation into the impact of and reasons for social workers moving from

local authorities to the voluntary sector. We recommend that resources are made available for the wide dissemination of the report.

It became obvious during the sitting of the Commission that social workers are not confident in articulating their role either in their personal life or with other professions. The panel hopes that the defined role will help social workers become more confident about their role in public and with other professions.

7.2 Recommendations

1. The generic nature of social work must be maintained and resources better targeted to enable social workers to work with families in a preventative role.

2. The role of Consultant Social Worker - a senior practitioner - should be re-introduced to keep experienced social workers on the front line, and an appropriate career and pay structure should be put in place to support those who do not wish to go into management.

8. Image

8.1 Comments

The public image of social workers seems to be largely derived from the media and it was regrettable that only a limited number of the media outlets approached responded to the panel’s request for their views. Our recommendations on this point are therefore less well-formed than they might otherwise have been. It has been mentioned in the report that the media reporting has, at times, been biased and has contributed to the lack of confidence that social workers have in their role. The panel would like to see a more balanced approach to social work by the media to counter the negative image and portrayal of social workers in the UK.

Social work’s image may be improved through a televised dramatisation of social work professionals and an accurate picture of the complex decision making that is part of their everyday work.

The panel would like to see a champion of social workers similar to the role of the Chief Social Worker in New Zealand who provides good news stories and cases which are published in the media.

The committee noted that only one in eight social workers are members of BASW, which does not have a press officer to help with public relations. Social work needs a strong, well respected professional association which will robustly promote the valuable role which social workers perform in society and can challenge inaccuracies in the media and explain difficult decisions to the public. This association needs to respond quickly to MPs and Government with a clear and unequivocal position which is accepted for the majority of the profession. It should be able to campaign for pay and conditions for social workers and seek to ensure that they are in line with those for similar professions. Different views were expressed amongst committee members as to whether this should involve an expanded role for BASW, working with Unison and other trade unions and with strong support from employers for their staff to become members, or whether (the majority view) a new body is needed similar to the RCN or the BMA which combines the function of negotiating on salaries and conditions of service with the role of a professional association.

8.2 Recommendations

3. Every social worker should be encouraged and have the opportunity to become a member of a professional body, similar to the BMA or RCN, which could advocate on their behalf, negotiate on salaries and conditions of service, provide good PR on behalf of the profession as a whole, and influence future government policy. Consideration should be given to a requirement that employers (including agency employers) fund this membership for the first post-qualifying year to ensure all new entrants to the profession can become members.

4. We recommend a Chief Social Worker (similar to the role of the Chief Social Worker in New Zealand) be employed in the Department of Health in the Office of the Director General of Social Care. He or she would work across government departments, with UNISON, BASW and other representative bodies and with the media to monitor the ‘health’ of the profession and with the media providing them with good news stories and cases.

9. Training

9.1 Comments

We welcome the introduction of the honours degree as the qualification for social work and the support provided to social work students and university

social work courses through the bursaries scheme, and the payment of university fees. We feel that this is a major attraction for students and recommend that these continue and keep pace with inflation and any increase in fees.

While it is appreciated that the GSCC is looking at the new degree structure and content, some of the panel felt that the basic qualifying degree should be extended to four years to ensure that all social workers have a strong grounding in research and law as well as the many other disciplines which contribute to social work. The difficulty in moving to a four year course is primarily the availability of funding but it is a necessary price to pay in order to have a competent and confident workforce.

We recommend that the social work degree continues to qualify social workers to practice (at the newly qualified level) with all age groups and in all the main areas of specialism. Following this generic qualifying degree, social workers can continue training in their chosen specialisms and using the post qualifying framework set down by the GSCC. Social workers should be encouraged to take Master’s degrees and other relevant qualifications.

The panel are concerned that understaffed children’s services departments do not allow sufficient time for social workers to continue training which is essential for their registration and for the updating of their knowledge and skills. Effective strategies must be in place to ensure that all social workers are given time for their professional development. Local authorities must establish better links with higher education establishments in order to improve research and training for both social workers on the front line and academics who are teaching social work.

In view of multi-agency working which is now the norm in social work, we recommend that social work training should involve other professionals such as teachers, doctors, nurses and police officers, so that each profession has a good understanding of the others’ roles and skills. This has proved very effective in some areas and should be widespread.

All child and family social workers should undertake specific post-qualifying training that relates to court work. This will help to prevent delays in cases and also enable social workers’ evidence, in some cases, to be considered sufficient without the calling of expert witnesses which can lead to further delays. There is no doubt that delays in court proceedings cause further mental anguish and damage to children and their families.

Closer links between employers and universities should be encouraged to facilitate the sharing of up-to-date knowledge and good quality practice placements.

9.1 Recommendations

5. **The social work degree must continue to be generic to allow social workers a good foundation in all aspects of social work.**
6. **The content and length of the degree must be reviewed to ensure that it provides a sufficient knowledge, theory, legislative, research and practice base, and extending it to four years should be considered.**
7. **Multi-agency training should be incorporated into the qualifying degree and should continue to be part of continuing professional development.**
8. **We recommend that the Department of Health and the Department of Children, Schools and Families work with local authorities and other employers of social workers to ensure that resources (both in course fees and replacement time) are available to ensure that all social workers can undertake the level of post-qualifying education and training necessary for the roles and tasks they are employed to undertake.**

10. Recruitment, retention and continuity

10.1 Comments

We recognise that the Government has done much over the last four years to improve the attraction of social work as a profession of choice. However, more needs to be done to address the continuing recruitment and retention difficulties that many employers report.

We were told that local recruitment was an effective strategy in many local authorities and helped to contribute to continuity of workers. Volunteer and cadet schemes for well qualified school leavers working alongside social workers have also proved successful in giving potential students experience before applying for university social work degree courses.

We recommend that experienced social care workers who have the necessary ability to complete an honours degree should be actively encouraged to undertake social work training. This requires the provision of sound advice and the standardisation of the confusing number of vocational and pre-degree courses so that Accreditation of Prior Learning schemes can be used

without any lowering of the honours degree academic level at the point of qualification as a social worker.

A high profile recruitment campaign similar to that for teachers or police officers is needed. We recommend that the government bodies responsible for recruiting social workers evaluate the impact of this recruitment campaign to see whether it has a positive impact on the image of the profession; and in particular, whether it conveys an accurate image of social workers, and distinguishes them from other social care workers.

We consider that retention rates of qualified staff will improve if the Newly Qualified Social Worker status is introduced.

The panel noted that the size of caseloads and the mix of ‘risk’ levels for each social worker were key to retention. When social workers are overburdened, stress and absence from sickness are frequent. Best practice in the amount and content of caseloads should be shared between local authorities and voluntary organisations.

We were told that experienced social work team leaders and other first line managers are of crucial importance in ensuring that social workers remain within the profession and with the same employer (thus ensuring greater continuity of service to children and families). We recommend that there are sufficient and good post-qualifying opportunities for the training of managers.

Local authorities must ensure that social workers in multi agency teams who are not managed by other social workers should have access to regular supervision and advice from an experienced social worker.

10.2 Recommendations

9. There should be a combination of a national recruitment campaign and local ‘head-hunting’ to encourage more people to enter social work.

10. There should be a high impact advertising campaign similar to that launched for the army, police and teachers, which sends a clear message that the role of social workers is important in society and should be respected.

11. The establishment of Newly Qualified Social Worker (NQSW) status is essential to support and retain inexperienced social workers. This should include protected caseloads and guaranteed post qualifying study and training time.

12. There needs to be a flexible pay structure which corresponds with other similar professionals working in multi-agency teams and which recognises differences in living costs around the country.

11. Governance

11.1 Comments

We recommend that all targets for child and family social workers should be reviewed and reduced with particular focus on ensuring that they do not inappropriately discourage the exercise of professional discretion. The link between financial reward to a local authority and how professional discretion is exercised is unacceptable.

We welcome the recommendation in ‘Time for Change’ that no one placement type should be seen as more desirable than another so that social workers can select the placement type which meets the individual need of the child.

The level of research and development in social care is small compared to the NHS and this must be addressed with investment in funds to strengthen the evidence-base not only in child protection work but also in preventative work, family support and community development.

There must be clear lines of accountability that are transparent across the local authorities and in multi-agency teams to prevent individual social workers being blamed when there are errors in judgements or services.

Local authorities must employ someone who understands every aspect of social work and who is well equipped to deal with the media effectively should matters concerning social work arise. This person must hold a senior position in their public relations office,.

Children’s and adults’ services departments must establish more effective and efficient administrative support services within social work teams so that social workers do not have to spend valuable time on tasks that can easily be carried out by less qualified people. One of the biggest complaints from both social workers and service users was the lack of time that social workers could spend with clients: this must be addressed.

We would like to see SCIE provide some benchmark models of good practice in the number and content of caseloads and in workforce strategies to ensure that social workers are not overburdened and are effectively supported.

The panel hopes that Local Area Agreements will continue to improve joint strategies and interagency working which are already showing benefits in early intervention which is crucial to the welfare of children and families.

11.2 Recommendations

13. Numerical adoption targets and other targets which are not in the best interests of the child should be phased out.

14. Better targeted funding should go into research and development of social care.

Appendix I – Biographies of Commission Panel Members

Tim Loughton MP (Chairman) Shadow Minister for Children

Tim Loughton is MP for East Worthing and Shoreham and Shadow Minister for Children. He has been a Member of Parliament since 1997.

He was first promoted to the front bench environment team in February 2000 with responsibility for regeneration, the regions and housing. In September 2001 he was made a Shadow Health Minister with mental health, social services and children's health, and since November 2003, he has been Shadow Minister for Children.

He now holds this position on the Shadow Children, Schools and Family team and is responsible for looked after children, SEN, PSHE, child welfare and social work, youth justice (shared with Shadow Justice Team) and general well being.

Allan Bowman

Allan Bowman was appointed Chair of the Social Care Institute for Excellence in April 2006. A qualified Social Worker, Allan began his career in Social Work in Scotland in 1972. He has held various posts north and south of the border and was Director of Social Work in Fife for 11 years and Strategic Director for Health and Social Care in Brighton & Hove for 6 years.

Latterly Allan was Head of Programmes with the Neighbourhood Renewal Unit, ODPM with responsibility for a range of Regeneration initiatives including the New Deal for Communities.

Specialising in Child Protection and Home Care he has spoken extensively on these subjects internationally and provided advice and consultancy on a range of community care and health issues in Europe and Canada.

Terry Butler CBE

Terry Butler CBE was Hampshire County Council’s Director of Social Services from 1988 to 2005. Nationally, he has regularly acted as a Government adviser and was seconded to the Department of Health in the early 1990s to help implement the community care reforms. He is a former member of the Home Office Advisory Board for Restricted Patients and Board of Governors for the National Institute for Social Work and was advisor to NPSA until 2007.

He is currently a Non Executive Director of the NHS South Central Strategic Health Authority and a Council Member for the General Social Care Council. He is also an Adviser for Social Care at the National Patient Safety Agency, Member of the Information Tribunal and Vice-President of the Relatives and Residents Association.

He is self-employed as an Adviser in Public Services and Social Care. In this capacity he does not undertake operational and management roles but offers strategic and professional advice, mentoring and assistance with the recruitment of senior executives.

Dr Ashok Chand

Ash has been a lecturer in the School of Health and Social Studies at the University of Warwick since 2005. Previously he was a lecturer at the University of Nottingham in the Centre for Social Work. Initially he taught on the Post Qualifying Child Care Award (PQCCA) for three years and taught on the Master of Arts / Post Graduate Diploma in Social Work (MA/PGDipSW) course.

Ash’s specialist research areas primarily centre on the child welfare system and its impact for minority ethnic families in the UK. Many of his publications evaluate and synthesize findings from existing research studies that consider child welfare policy and practice and its appropriateness for minority ethnic children and families.

Felicity Collier

Felicity qualified in social work in 1978 and gained an MPhil in Social Work at Brunel University in 1994. She is a registered social worker .

Felicity worked as a child care social worker in Slough from 1978-82 , and then joined the Buckinghamshire Probation service as a probation officer working with young offenders. In 1985 she was appointed senior probation officer and set up the first county specialist divorce court welfare team and in 1989 became county training manager. Felicity was active in NAPO and chaired the Berks, Bucks and Oxfordshire branch. From 1992-95 she was, assistant chief probation officer in Oxfordshire, and responsibilities included young offender institutions, prisons, hostels, day centre, drug and alcohol services and media relations.

Felicity was Chief Executive of BAAF (British Association for Adoption and Fostering) from 1995 -2006 , where she initiated a number of landmark

developments in the field of child placement and adoption , including writing An Action Plan to improve Adoption services, based on research she had led, and this was launched in the House of Commons in 1998 . Almost all the Report's recommendations have been taken forward including new adoption legislation, national adoption standards , paid adoption leave, comprehensive adoption support services and a national adoption register. Felicity was a member of the President's Adoption Committee and the Sure Start audit committee and has written and spoken widely on adoption, fostering and child care issues . She was joint author of “The Cost of Foster care” which set out the case for major new investment in foster care across the UK. Felicity has also undertaken serious case reviews for local authorities

Felicity has led a number of successful campaigns to improve services for children .A poll of Community Care magazine readers in 2005 voted her the most influential person in childcare .

Felicity was a co-opted member of the Ethics and Law Committee of the HFEA (Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority) from 2003-6 and was Chair of the Standards and Ethics Board of BASW (British Association of Social Work) 2006-7. Felicity is now consultant director for Care and Health , responsible for the children's conference programme and is a trustee of Adoption UK, the membership association for adoptive parents.

Felicity has five children, two of whom are local authority child care social workers , and ten grandchildren and is looking forward to spending more time with her family, while remaining passionate about the importance of social work in improving the lives of society's most vulnerable children.

Melanie P K Gill

Melanie Gill is a Brighton-based child forensic Psychologist. She is one of the founders of Commonsense Associates, the practice is based at the Sussex Medical Chambers in Hove, and utilises radical and innovative multi-disciplinary approaches that seek to solve psychological problems as effectively and quickly as possible.

She serves on the South Downs Mental Health Act Tribunal Panel and works part-time in a GP surgery in Brighton which deals with the most deprived areas of the city.

She has also helped with the Centre for Social Justice in organising a symposium to highlight social problems and the increasing criminalisation of children: ‘Thugs beyond Redemption’, at which David Cameron coined the ‘Hug a Hoodie’ phrase. She was an adviser on the Family Breakdown Policy

group advising David Cameron, which produced policy recommendations in ‘Breakthrough Britain’, following on from the publication of ‘Breakdown Britain’, She is also part of a group of experts in child issues who are attempting to change attitudes and policy to deal with the growing number of vulnerable families and children through ‘Psycho-Politics’.

She trained at Brunel University in the late 70’s, working in special schools and a high security remand home for adolescent girls. She studied Child Forensics at Leeds University, her other academic interests and training are in Cognitive Neuropsychology and Schema Therapy. She has had extensive careers in both the music and television industries. She is at present also setting up a psycho-legal phone line, to try to fill the gap caused by diminishing community and legal aid services.

Mark Houston

Mark is a Development Officer in Hampshire County Council, Adult Services Department, where he has specific responsibilities for service user and carer participation.

He has both personal and professional experiences of social work. Having received support from Social Services as a child with a disability, he became actively involved in his local care forum. This led on to working part-time in the Children & Families strategy team where he led on a number of projects across the Council, while studying for his degree in mathematics.

He has also worked closely with teams in the Department of Health, the former Department for Education & Skills and the former Office of the Deputy Prime Minister in relation to social care legislation and guidance, including the Quality Protects programme and the Every Child Matters agenda.

He also has a wide range of experiences with the voluntary sector. He is a member of the Young Minds Council and has undertaken project work with a number of other charities, including the National Autistic Society, the British Institute for Brain Injured Children and the UK Youth Parliament. He has also served on various Parliamentary Committees, including the All Party Group for Looked After Children and Care Leavers and the All Party Group on Autism.

The Baroness Morris of Bolton OBE

Trish Morris entered the House of Lords in June 2004. In September of that year she joined the front bench team in Education and Health and is

currently Shadow Minister for Children, School and Families, Women and an Opposition Whip. Prior to entering the Lords, Trish was Vice-Chairman of the Conservative Party with responsibility for candidates.

She is President of the National Benevolent Institution, a trustee of the disability partnership, co-chair of women in public policy and a governor and trustee of her old school Bolton School. A former member of the Advisory Committee to the Abbot of Ampleforth, Trish also served as Deputy Chairman of the Salford Royal Hospitals NHS Trust and as a Director of Bolton Lads & Girls Club.

She is also patron of OXPIP, the Oxford Parent-Infant Project, which is a registered charity working with families who are struggling to cope with the emotional demands of their baby and helping them to form secure attachments.

Polly Neate

Polly Neate is Executive Director of Public Affairs and Communications at NCH, the children’s charity, which she joined in November 2005. Her directorate includes communications, campaigns, public policy, marketing and new business. She is part of NCH’s Executive Management Team.

A journalist by profession, Polly’s previous role was as editor of Community Care, the leading weekly social care magazine, where she was responsible for two magazines, several web-based products, and an annual programme of conferences and large-scale events.

Polly has spoken widely on social care for both children and adults, the media, and the relationship between the two, both on conference platforms and in the media. She has also written for other magazines and national newspapers, and has won several awards for writing, campaigning and editing, including the Periodical Publishers Association Business and Professional Magazine of the Year, and Campaign of the Year.

She has sat on several stakeholder and working groups for government.

Alastair Pettigrew

After graduating with degrees in Economics in 1964 and 1965 Alastair worked initially in industry in a management services function in a couple of multinational companies. During this period he was a volunteer for a charity for the homeless. He then completed social work training in 1972 and worked initially as a probation officer in inner London and then as a

psychiatric social worker in the children's department of the Maudsley Hospital.

Next he ran a day project for young offenders; this project employed teachers, social workers and youth workers and was an alternative to Care and custody. Subsequently he joined Kensington & Chelsea social services department initially as a manager of 9 children's homes and subsequently as manager of under fives, fostering and adoption, child protection, CAMHS and children with disabilities and the Youth Offending Team. Two years ago he became Director of Children's Social Care in Lewisham.

CLlr. Shireen Ritchie

Shireen Ritchie is a Councillor in the Royal Borough of Kensington, a diverse area of central London. It is the most densely populated local authority in the country and displays great contrasts in its' population, including ethnic and linguistic diversity and wide socio-economic disparities.

Shireen is the statutory Lead Member for Children in the borough, under the Children Act 2004. In 2005 Kensington & Chelsea was one of only 11 authorities in England to achieve an overall 'excellent' rating for children's services.

Shireen is the Executive Cabinet Member for the Family and Children's Services business group and has responsibility for Social Care services to children, Child protection, Children – Looked After, Adoption, Fostering, Family Support and Youth Services and an overview responsibility for education. She has served on both the Adoption and Permanency and the Fostering Panels of the local authority.

Shireen is Vice President of UK Youth, the largest non-uniformed charity for young people in the country. She is also sits on the Trustee Board of BAAF.

Shireen is active in the central organisation of the Conservative Party, particularly in respect of Candidate Selection.

Carolyn Steen Chartered Psychologist

Carolyn Steen is a Chartered Psychologist specialising in the assessment of children and families as an Expert witness for the Courts.

She trained as an educational psychologist, family mediator and family therapist and has worked in schools, clinics, hospitals and children's homes in London.

She has spent much of her time working in children's charities and other voluntary organisations. She chaired Coram Family for 6 years and was

instrumental in refocusing, rebranding and raising it’s profile as well as setting up, with others, the adjacent Foundling Museum

Professor June Thoburn CBE

Professor June Thoburn CBE LittD is an Emeritus Professor of Social Work at the University of East Anglia. She is a registered Social Worker and has worked in child and family social work in England and Canada. She has an international reputation for her publications on family support, child protection and adoption and fostering and has just completed a study of children in care in 15 countries, funded by the Leverhulme Foundation.

Flick Drummond
Clerk to the Commission and Report Editor

Flick Drummond is finishing a Masters degree at Southampton University. She is a former OFSTED school inspector, was on the Winchester and Eastleigh Community Health Council 1991-1999 and chaired the Winchester branch of the National Childbirth Trust 1990-3. Flick stood as a Conservative parliamentary candidate in Southampton Itchen in 2005 and has recently been selected as Conservative parliamentary candidate for Portsmouth South. She is a mother of 4 teenage children.

Appendix II – Record of Written Submissions

A National Voice
ADCS & ADSS – The Association of Directors of Children’s Services
Advance Children's Services
Andrea Rowe, Skills for Care
Anne Harris, Project Manager, SNAP
Anne Reyersbach, Public Policy Manager, School-Home Support Service (UK)
Anne Marie Carrie, Executive Director for Family and Children’s Services,
Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea
Anthony Douglass, Chief Executive of CAFCASS and Chair of BAAF
Anthony Kirk, QC, Family Law Bar Association
AIMS Association for Improvements in the Maternity Services
Barbara Hearn, Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Policy Research, NCB
Barnardo's
Beverley Lawrence Beech, Chair AIMS
Both Parents Forever
British Association for Adoption & Fostering
British Association of Social Workers
Buckinghamshire County Council/Children's Trust
CAFCASS – The Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service
Cambridgeshire Children's Services (Cllr Jill Tuck – Cabinet Member for
Inclusion with Children’s Services)
Cathy Hadley, Advance Children’s Services
Centre for Child and Family Research, Loughborough
Centre for Special Needs Education and Research University of Northampton
Charles Pragnell (Independent Social Care Consultant)
Charlotte Smith, Parliamentary Advisor, NSPCC
Children's Services and Lifelong Learning
Children's Workforce Development Council
Coram Family
CSCI – Commission for Social Care Inspection
CSV – Community Service Volunteers
Cllr David Simmonds Cabinet Member for Education and Children's Services
in Hillingdon
Cllr Jill Tuck, Cabinet member for Inclusion, Children’s Services,
Cambridgeshire County council
Cllr Jane Pitman, Lead Member Children’s Services, Hertfordshire County
Council
Cllr Rupert Reichhold, Northamptonshire County Council
Dame Elisabeth Hoodless, Executive Director CSV
Daily Mail - Robin Esser, Executive Managing Editor
Dianne Roberts, Operations Manager, WELCARE
Dr Gall (Social Worker)
Dr Peter Beresford OBE, Chair, Shaping our Lives

Commission on Social Workers
No More Blame Game – The Future for Children’s Social Workers

Dr Richard Gray, Principal Lecturer in Primary Care, Brighton and Sussex Medical School
Emma Carr, Strategy Directorate, CSCI
Don Brand, SCIE
F.A.C.T - Families Achieving Change Together
False Allegations
Families Need Fathers
Family Education trust
FASO - False Allegations Support Organisation
FASSIT – Families Anti Social Services Inquiry Team
General Social Care Council
Gloucestershire County Council
Grandparents Action Group UK
Grandparents Apart Self Help Group
Hammersmith and Fulham Council Community and Children's Services (Cllr Antony Lillis, Cabinet Member)
Hampshire County Council (Hilary Hickmore, County strategy manager - CAMHS and emotional well being)
Helen Grant (Family Law Solicitor), Grant Solicitors
Helga Pile, National Officer, UNISON Local Government Service Group
Hertfordshire County Council (Cllr Jane Pitman, Lead Member Children’s Services)
Hounslow Council (Chris Hogan, Assistant Director - Children's Services and Lifelong Learning)
Hounslow Council Social Workers
Ian Josephs, FASSIT
Jane Haywood, Chief Executive, CWDC
Jane Held, Advisor, LGA
Jean Daintith, Executive Director for Housing, Health and Adult Social Care, Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea
Jean Pardey, Director, Volunteering Partnerships, CSV
Jean Robinson, AIMS
Jessica Lee (Family Law Barrister)
John Baker, Chair of Trustees, Families Need Fathers
Jo Davidson, Group Director of Children and Young People’s Services, Gloucestershire County Council
John Bell, Director of Legal Services, Both Parents Forever
John Hart, CBE Chief Executive, Coram Family
John Tabor, Director OXPIP
John Wilkinson, Corporate Children’s Act Manager, Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea
Kevin Williams, Chief Executive, TACT
The Law Society
Leicestershire County Council (Cllr David Sprason County Councillor and Lead member Adult Social Care)
LGA - Local Government Association

Commission on Social Workers
No More Blame Game – The Future for Children’s Social Workers

Lisa Homes, Centre for Child and Family Research, Loughborough University
London Borough of Sutton (Ian Lewis, Service Manager, Adoption and
Permanence and Maureen Flloyd, Service Manager, Family Support)
Lydia Boles, Social Worker, Eastbourne
Margaret Bell, Director Medical Issues, Both Parents Forever
Margaret Gardner, Director, FASO
Maxine Wrigley, National Co-ordinator, A National Voice
Michael Barnes, National Secretary, FACT
Mike Ellis, Chairman, NSCFC
Mike Wardle, Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Strategy, GSCC
National Children’s Bureau
NSCFC -National Society for Children and Family Contact
NATC – New Approaches to Contact
Nicholas Crichton, District Judge Inner London Family Court
Norman Wells, Director, Family Education Trust
NICCYP -Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People
NSPCC – National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children
Oliver Cyriax, New Approaches to Contact NATC
OXPIP Oxford Parent Infant Project
Pamela Wilson, Chairperson for the Grandparents Action Group UK
Patricia Lewsley, Commissioner, Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children
and Young People
Pre-School Learning Alliance
Professor Harriet Ward, Director for Child and Family Research,
Loughborough University
Professor Richard Rose, Professor of Special Needs and Inclusive Education,
University of Nottingham
Rachel Bramble Social Worker
Richard Lingham Director of Social Services Cornwall 1979/87
Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea (John Wilkinson Corporate
Children Act Manager)
Rupert Reichhold County Councillor for East Northamptonshire Council
Ruth Leach Bing - Independent Educational Adviser
School Home Support
SCIE - The Social Care institute for Excellence
Shaping Our Lives
Skills for Care
Steve Alexander, Chief Executive, Pre School Learning Alliance
SNAP -St Neots Abuse Project
Supporting Grandparents
Susanna Cheal, Chief Executive, Who Cares? Trust
Sutton Council
TACT – The Adolescent and Children’s Trust
The Family Law Bar Association
The Fostering Network
The Law Society

Commission on Social Workers
No More Blame Game – The Future for Children’s Social Workers

The Who Cares? Trust

UNISON

Unity-Injustice

Warrington Borough Council (Cllr Sheila Woodyatt)

WELCARE

Young People and Learning Services London Borough of Sutton

Yvonne Coulter, Unity Injustice Group

Appendix III – Record of Oral Submissions

1 February 2007

Lynne Berry, Chief Executive, General Social Care Council

22 February 2007

Jane Held
Local Government Association

Bill Kilgallon and Amanda Edwards
Social Care Institute for Excellence

8 March 2007

CLlr David Simmonds
Deputy Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Education and
Children's Services
Hillingdon Council

John Dunkerley,
Head of Children's Social Care & Youth Services
Warrington Council

Chris Hogan
Assistant Director - Children and Families
Children's Services and Lifelong Learning
Hounslow Council

Cathi Hadley
Assistant Director
Advance Children's Services

Ian H Johnston
Chief Executive
British Association of Social Workers

22 March 2007

Pam Wilson
(Chairwoman)
Dianne Pick

(Activist)
Grandparents Action Group UK

Jessica Lee
Barrister who specialises in children’s law

Anthony Kirk QC (Chair)
Elizabeth Lawson QC
Family Law Bar Association

Anthony Douglas
Chief Executive, CAFCASS

19 April 2007

Dame Elisabeth Hoodless (Executive Director) and Jean Pardey (Association
UK Director of Volunteering Partners)
Community Service Volunteers

Dr Carol Homden (Chief Executive) and Trevor Sharman (Head of Support
Services)
Coram Family

Wes Cuell (Director of Children’s Services)
Enid Hendry (Director of Training and Consultancy Services).
NSPCC

Professor Harriet Ward (Director of Centre for Child and Family Research
Loughborough University)

Beverley Beech (Chair of Association for Improvements in Maternity Services)

10 May 2007

Professor Peter Beresford
Director
Shaping Our Lives

John Simmonds
Director of Policy, Research and Development
BAAF

Dr Andrea Warman
A consultant member of John Simmonds’ team at BAAF

Simon Nixon (Young Persons Involvement Worker, A National Voice)
Clare Edge (Young person)
A National Voice

Andrew Christie
Director of Children’s Services, London Borough of Hammersmith & Fulham
On behalf of ADCS

Family Law Court Judge Nick Crichton

24 May 2007

Kevin Williams
Chief Executive
The Adolescent and Children’s Trust

Jackie Lewis
Vice Chair of National Social Care Forum
Helga Pile
National Officer
Local Government Service Group
UNISON

Mr Sam Monaghan
Midlands Director
Barnardo’s

Imelda Richardson
Regional Director for the South West Region
Commission for Social Care Inspection

20 June 2007

Telephone conversation with Marie Connolly, Chief Social Worker of New Zealand

31 July 2007

Roger Morgan
Children’s Rights Director for England

15 August 2007

Detective Chief Superintendent Alastair Jeffrey
New Scotland Yard
Francesca Barson
New Scotland Yard
Metropolitan Police

3 September 2007

Lydia Boles
Social Worker, Duty and Assessment team, Eastbourne

Appendix IV – Background information on prominent social work organisations

The Care Standards Act 2000 and General Social Care Council (GSCC)

The Care Standards Act 2000 set up the General Social Care Council (GSCC) to replace the Central Council for Education and Training in Social Work (CCETSW). The Care Council for Wales was established at the same time.

The Act differentiated between the term social worker and social care workers and, for the first time in the history of social care in England, made it compulsory for social workers to register with the newly established GSCC.

The GSCC has been tasked to ensure high standards of conduct and practice among social care workers and high standards in their training. It is specifically required to accredit and quality assure the qualifying and post-qualifying education and training of social workers by establishing and maintaining a register of social care workers in England. (To date, only social workers and student social workers are included and required by law to register, but GSCC is in the process of registering some priority groups of social care workers). Responsibility for others working within the children’s and adult social care workforce rests with Skills for Care and the Children’s Workforce Development Council (CWDC).

It is now an offence to use the title of social worker without registration or to imply that a person has been registered.

There are now stringent conditions to become a social worker. Social workers have to complete an honours degree course and follow any requirements with respect to post qualifying training set down by the GSCC.

The Care Standards Act also required the GSCC to publish a code of practice which set out the standards of conduct and practice expected of social workers and other social care workers. Social workers can have their registration suspended or terminated at any time they are not complying with the regulations. The GSCC runs Conduct Hearings when social workers are alleged not to have complied with the Code of Practice. Appeals against the decisions of Conduct Committees can be made to the Care Standards Tribunal.

The GSCC used to be responsible for paying bursaries to student Social workers and grants to higher education institutions to support the provision of Social Work education. This has recently been transferred to a separate body.

The GSCC has registered 76,894 Social workers and around 14,500 student social workers since 2003. Around 4,800 registered social workers come from overseas (GSCC Annual Report 2005-6).

Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI)

The Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) registers, inspects and reports on providers of some publicly provided and independent sector social care services in England (mainly residential and domiciliary care services, including foster care and adoption services). On 1st April 2007 CSCI’s responsibility for children’s services passed to Ofsted.

The CSCI has used the findings of the CSCI inspections and assessments to report on the state of social care in England and has recently published ‘The State of Social Care in England 2005-6’ which describes how far trends in social care have changed over the year, looks in depth at commissioning by councils and support provided by family carers, and provides an overview of the current state of social care across the public, voluntary and private sectors. Its focus is more on adult’s than children’s services.

The CSCI works closely with OFSTED, GSCC, SCIE, the Children Workforce Development Council (CWDC) and Skills for Care (SfC), all of which add to the overview of social work in England.

The Social Care institute for Excellence (SCIE)

SCIE was established as part of the strategy to improve social care by improving the knowledge base, promotion and development of good practice of the whole social care workforce including social workers with adults, and child and family social workers.

The role of SCIE is:

- To establish a knowledge base for social care
- To identify what works in social care
- To use that knowledge to develop guidance for policy and practice
- To then disseminate that knowledge and practice guidance as widely as possible
- And finally to support the implementation of that practice guidance – so that social care services are improved and that the improvement is knowledge based.

SCIE produces knowledge based publications for social work and social care practitioners, student social workers and for post qualifying training, most of which can be accessed on their website.

The Office for Standards in Education, Children’s Services and Skills (Ofsted)

The new Ofsted was established on April 1 2007 and brings together the four formerly separate inspectorates. It now inspects and regulates care for children and young people, and inspects education and training for learners of all ages. The Education and Inspections Act stated that the role of Ofsted is to:

- Promote service improvement
- Ensure services focus on the interests of their users
- See that services are efficient, effective and promote value for money.

Ofsted publishes their findings in Inspection Reports which are accessible on their website. They also report on specific subject findings and recommendations on wider issues within the care, learning and skills agenda, as well as statutory information which can be found in their Publications and research area of the website.

British Association of Social workers (BASW)

BASW is a professional association and, unlike other professional associations such as the BMA or the RCN, does not have trade union functions and is not involved in salary negotiations. It was founded in 1970 and represents 11,000 Social workers in the UK. It campaigns on behalf of social work issues and sees itself as an important voice for social workers and for social work service users.

It works closely with the International Federation of Social Workers (especially its Europe branch).

It provides local support for Social workers, training courses and produces publications.

UNISON

UNISON, the largest trade union body in the UK, represents 40,000 Social workers across the UK including those in the local authorities and independent and voluntary sector.

UNISON responds to Government papers on Social workers and has recently responded to the publication ‘Care Matters’ and to the GSCC consultation on ‘Roles and Tasks of Social Work in England’.

Glossary

ADCS - The Association of Directors of Children’s Services

BAAF - British Association of Adoption and Fostering

BASW - British Association of Social workers

CAFCASS -The Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service

CSCI - Commission for Social Care Inspection

CSV – Community Service Volunteers

CWDC - Skills for Care and the Children’s Workforce Development Council

FACT -Families Achieving Change Together

FASO – False Allegations Support Organisation

FASSIT – Families Anti Social Services Inquiry Team

GSCC - General Social Care Council

LAC – Looked after Children

LGA – Local Government Association

NICCY - Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People

NSPCC - National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children

NCH – National Children’s Homes

NCB – National Children’s Bureau

NQSW - Newly Qualified Social worker

OXPIP- Oxford Parent Infant Project

SCIE The Social Care institute for Excellence

TACT - The Adolescent and Children’s Trust