

Meeting of the Cross-Party Group on Social Work

Tuesday 27 September 2022, 18:00-19:45

The Future of Social Work

Minute

Present

MSPs

Fulton MacGregor MSP (Convenor)
Paul O’Kane MSP (Deputy Convenor)
Jeremy Balfour MSP (Deputy Convenor)
Kevin Stewart MSP (Minister for Wellbeing & Social Care)

Invited guests

Colin Turbett (Retired social worker and social commentator)
Cllr Paul Kelly (COSLA Health and Social Care Spokesperson)
Sara Redmond (Chief Officer The Health and Social Care Alliance)

Non-MSP Group Members

Alison Bavidge (Scottish Association of Social Work)
Jonny Adamson (Scottish Association of Social Work)
Anne-Marie Monaghan (Scottish Association of Social Work)
Sarah Jackson (Scottish Association of Social Work)
Karin Heber (Scottish Association of Social Work)

Sarah Anderson (Scottish Association of Social Work)
Caroline McDonald (Scottish Association of Social Work)
John McGowan (Social Worker's Union)
Lizzie Thomson (CELCIS)
Eileen Stewart (Individual Member)
Jenny Miller (PAMIS)
Hannah Tweed (The Alliance)
Keith Dyer (Individual Member)
Shubhanna Hussain-Ahmed (Coalition of Carers in Scotland)
Calum Campbell (Social Work Scotland)
Jo Savege (Scottish Association of Social Work)
John Watson (UNISON)
Ben Farrugia (Social Work Scotland)
Robert White (ILF)
Ruairi McMurray (Individual Member)
Fiona Culbert (Individual Member)
Jonathan Gray (Individual Member)
Bob Barr (Individual Member)
Sandra Campbell (Individual Member)
Donna Scott (Individual)
Dee Fraser (IRISS)
Peter Scott (ILF)
Jill Laspa (COSLA)
Megan Farr (Children's Commissioner's Office)
Maree Allison (SSSC)
Suzanne McGuinness (Mental Welfare Commission)
Patricia Munteanu (Individual)
Zoe Sharpe (Individual)
Karen Pedder (Individual)
Sam Ella (IRISS)
Matt Crilly (COSLA)
Lisa Kerr (Individual)
Abbi Jackson (Individual)
Dawn Ranson (Individual)
Alison Miller (Shared Lives Plus)
Chris McCully (Community Justice Scotland)
Kirsteen MacLennan (Individual)
Judith Turbyne (Children in Scotland)
Emma Watt (Individual)

Observers

Danielle Schull (Individual)
Iain Ramsay (OCSW)
Iona Colvin (OCSWA)
Russell Hogarth (Individual)
Ruth Buchanan (Individual)
Geri McCormick (Glasgow City Health and Social Care Partnership)
Karen Hoyle (Individual)

Alistair Brown (Individual)
Joanna MacDonald (OCSWA)
Colin Slasberg (Individual)
Rod Finan (OCSWA)
Andy Bell (Individual)
Anna Kynaston (Scottish Government)
Mary Dickson (attended on behalf of Katy Clark MSP)
Kate Ramsden (UNISON)
Tia McGregor (Individual)
Craig Cowan (Glasgow City Health and Social Care Partnership)
Ashleigh Colgan (Individual)
Steven Blair (Glasgow City Health and Social Care Partnership)
Allison Eccles (Glasgow City Health and Social Care Partnership)
Rachel Mackay (Glasgow City Health and Social Care Partnership)

Apologies

Charlie McMillan (SCLD)
Cath Montgomery (ILF)
Gary Spolander (Individual)
Lindsey Young (Scottish Association of Social Work)
Michelle Drumm (IRISS)
Paul McLennan MSP

Agenda item 1- Welcome and AGM

Fulton MacGregor welcomed attendees to the third meeting of the Cross-Party Group on Social Work, which also serves as the group's AGM, and asked for agreement of the minutes from the last meeting. John McGowan proposed the minutes, which were seconded by Lizzie Thomson.

Fulton then handed to Alison Bavidge for the AGM. The following individuals and organisations were elected to roles:

Convenor: Fulton MacGregor MSP (nominated by Jo Savege and seconded by Hannah Tweed)

Deputy Convenors: Jeremy Balfour MSP and Paul O'Kane MSP (nominated by John McGowan and seconded by Ben Farrugia)

Secretariat: Scottish Association of Social Work (nominated by Fulton MacGregor and seconded by Keith Dyer)

Alison handed back to Fulton who explained that the focus for the evening will predominantly be on the National Care Service Bill. Fulton then welcomed and introduced the Minister for Wellbeing and Social Care, Kevin Stewart to the meeting.

Agenda item 2- Presentation: Overview of NCS Bill

Kevin Stewart explained that the National Care Service Bill proposals intend to bring together social work, social care and community health to strengthen health and social care integration. Accountability will transfer from local government to Scottish Ministers, but a decision has not been taken yet on whether children's and justice services will be included. The aim is to ensure consistent, fair and high quality care for everyone in Scotland, reducing variations. He stressed that it is not about centralisation. Services will continue to be designed and delivered locally. He said the government's ambition is for a social care system that empowers people to thrive, not just survive. The principles will be person centred, with human rights at the very centre of social care. The Bill creates a framework for this to happen, although he appreciates that this has led to uncertainty around the end product. To ensure the government gets it right, he explained we need to include as many people as possible in its design so that it is a truly person-centred system.

The government's ambition is to raise the status of and ensure investment in social work. They want to create the conditions where social workers are supported to work more effectively with people. To meet this objective, the intention is to have a National Social Work Agency established within government as part of the NCS structure. It will provide national leadership for the profession, including establishing a centre for excellence and scaling up good practice. It will also include workforce planning and a national approach to social work terms and conditions, including pay and grading.

He highlighted that we must all work in partnership to design the detail and create the certainty for the NCS. He therefore wants to hear about the challenges the profession faces and whether these proposals will address them. The co-design process will inform if and where secondary legislation is needed and it's integral that lived experience is at the heart of this process. The government has launched a lived experience panel and details for how to register are on the Scottish Government website. There is also a stakeholder register for those representing an organisation with an interest in health and social care. And the first National Care Service Forum will take place on 3 October.

Agenda item 3- Presentation: The Future of Social Work

Fulton thanked Kevin for his presentation and introduced the second speaker, Colin Turbett. Colin was a social worker and team manager in the West of Scotland for 40 years and writes about social work from a critical and radical standpoint.

Colin started by saying he's a member of Common Weal and much of his presentation comes from their work. He explained that the Social Work Scotland Act 1968 was crafted around the notion of social work being in communities. It was about social workers working alongside people in those communities to determine what services and support were needed. Sadly, the plethora of legislation that has come in since has moved us away from this intention. Social work expanded in the 1970s, with more resources poured into the frontline. But this changed in the 1980s with different attitudes from the UK Government at the time towards local authorities,

which social work has never recovered from. Social work became increasingly focused on risk rather than relationships, preferring to look at the end result rather than the process. And the profession's public protection role became more tightly regulated, resulting in lengthy procedures. As demands increased, eligibility criteria became the gatekeeper for who could access services. On top of that, local authorities were reorganising in the 1990s and the decision to end the statutory role of directors of social work severely weakened the profession. Statutory social work services became concerned with the group of people who were in deep crisis. When austerity came in after the financial crash, the focus on this group became even greater to the detriment of intervening earlier in the lives of people who needed support.

This has led to a disconnect between the education of social workers and what actually happens in practice today. The social work workforce is disillusioned and burnt out, as demonstrated by the Setting the Bar report. Social workers want to practice in a way that works alongside people and focuses on their strengths, which is the premise of community social work as set out in the 1968 Act. This would prevent people falling into crisis point in the first place. The future of social work must focus on the relationship-based, preventative work. We must continue to meet the statutory responsibilities but also release the potential of social workers to mend broken communities. That means rebuilding communities from the bottom up, not prescribing them from government.

Agenda item 4- Panel Discussion

Alison Bavidge introduced our panel members for a discussion on the National Care Service; Kevin Stewart MSP, Jeremy Balfour MSP, Paul O'Kane MSP, Cllr Paul Kelly (COSLA) and Sara Redmond (Health and Social Care Alliance). Panellists have one minute to respond to each question.

1. What will be the impact of taking social work out of local authority control? What will improve and what are the risks?

Kevin Stewart MSP: This is all about people. And people are telling us that the current approach is not delivering the quality of services they need. There is a post-code lottery. I also hear from social workers that they don't have the autonomy or empowerment they once had. Social workers are actually discouraged from being creative. We need creativity to deliver what is best for people and that's why we must co-design this service. We must also call out this myth of centralisation- while we will have national standards, it will be delivered at local level.

Jeremy Balfour MSP: The biggest concern is centralised control. We've already seen that centralising Police Scotland hasn't worked well. A top down model will not help local communities or people. The one positive I do see in the Bill is information sharing. It will be easier for individuals if they don't have to share information with many different bodies, but I believe we can do that by keeping a local focus. The lack of detail in the Bill is also a serious concern.

Paul O’Kane MSP: There are risks around the devaluation of the profession and people feeling devalued in their role. I hope there will be an opportunity to improve how social workers are empowered to make decisions, particularly around resources. I think we’ve become too resource-led and moved away from the principle of being outcome focused. We don’t want people making decisions solely on resource. So, we can’t be too focused on changing the structure if we don’t change the culture.

Cllr Paul Kelly: The Bill is not clear on how it will improve social work or address systematic underfunding of services. From a local government perspective, we want to see improvements now. The Scottish Government is planning to spend £500m per year on the running costs of the NCS and we’d like to see that funding being used to address challenges right now. We’re also concerned that the Bill separates social work from local services, like education, housing and welfare, which risks losing local decision making.

Sara Redmond: We know from speaking to members of the Alliance and individuals with experience of accessing social care that there is a huge appetite for greater consistency of services and continuity of care. There is an opportunity for us to have a discussion on what is on the surface of the Bill so that we can realise people’s rights to access care, their right to health and to independent living.

2. We know we need to recruit and train more social workers. Will a NCS create conditions that make social work an attractive career and how might social work education need to change in the future?

Kevin Stewart MSP: Social workers are highly skilled individuals, and we must recognise that while also acknowledging that we must change some of the cultures that exist around focusing on risk. The National Social Work Agency will support and invest in social work by providing national leadership and supporting social work in pre and post qualifying education, scaling up good practice, a centre of excellence, workforce planning and training and development. This will enable social workers to work more effectively with people.

Jeremy Balfour MSP: The simple answer is we must make it an attractive profession. I benefited from social work in the 1960s and 1970s because I met social workers who wanted to help people and make people’s lives better. We need to sell the profession in that light and that will attract people to it.

Paul O’Kane MSP: Social workers currently feel burnt out. They’re dealing with unmanageable caseloads and there is a huge recruitment and training issue that needs to be addressed so that we’re properly valuing the workforce. And that takes investment, consideration of pay scales and how we train social workers so we don’t end up in a situation where we’re essentially competing for social workers in an ever diminishing pool.

Cllr Paul Kelly: The CPG flash report in January highlighted that social work is misunderstood, undervalued and under-resourced. We need to address these problems now. Social workers are under extreme pressure, not helped by budget cuts, which makes it an unattractive profession. The NCS Bill doesn’t address any of

these issues. Better funding would alleviate some of these challenges and more should be done to increase training opportunities and improve wellbeing now. This includes more flexible education and adequate opportunities for placements

Sara Redmond: There are some welcome drivers for change within the Bill. Including on ethical commissioning, fair work and human rights being the foundation for the NCS. We want to see a stronger requirement for care boards to deliver training. We typically hear that there is a lack of understanding about what a human rights based approach means. So we want to see a stronger emphasis on improving understanding of this within training cultures.

3. The Independent Review of Adult Social Care recommended re-opening the Independent Living Fund. The ILF is a great example of the flexibility and creativity that can be applied to ensuring people have real control and choice for the services they use. Why haven't we been able to replicate this responsiveness and flexibility in SDS arrangements through local authorities? Would an NCS address this problem head on and offer real control and choice?

Kevin Stewart MSP: I'm really quite disappointed about how SDS works in certain places. We've got to get that better and that's why we need national consistency of service quality. But we also need to allow care boards the flexibility to design services that reflect things locally. We need to export best practice and where we are failing we shouldn't be afraid to put the right standards in. We are committed to giving a strong voice to people on these issues so we get it right.

Jeremy Balfour MSP: I actually think the SDS legislation was one of the best pieces of legislation to come through the parliament in the last 20 years. And I don't think there's been a cultural change in local authorities. I think too many people at the top of social work and councils have not grabbed the opportunities that SDS can provide. It's not all about resources, it's about giving people choices and understanding what works for each individual.

Paul O'Kane MSP: It is about making sure we use legislation to embed the right culture. I worked in the learning disability sector before politics and I saw challenges around packages for informal support being reduced and the impact this had on people's quality of life. So we need to think about culture but also ensuring funding and resources are in place. And doing what's right for the individual first.

Cllr Paul Kelly: In terms of the Independent Living Fund, we don't need the NCS to implement it again. The government could look at it right now. There are challenges around SDS, not least because of increasing demand and insufficient funding. But despite limited resources, local authorities are working hard and taking creative approaches. Local authorities are fully committed to SDS and improvement work is continuing to take place at both local and national levels.

Sara Redmond: The current public service management approach is part of the problem. We're trying to address complex issues in ways that don't meet the environment we're working in. We need to have a really strong focus on

implementation. That includes having the right kinds of information gathering and routes for people to raise issues if their rights are not being realised.

4. The proposals for the National Care Service will take time to implement. In light of the recent setting the bar report, what assurances can be given that work will be undertaken now to improve the working conditions of social workers and resource the unmet need in our communities currently resulting in much crisis?

Kevin Stewart MSP: The government welcomes the Setting the Bar report and we acknowledge the significant pressures social workers face. That's why we invested £200,000 in the social work professional support service to provide peer support for social workers from 2021 to 2023. It's also why we announced £25million additional funding to relieve pressure on the adult social care sector in the Budget to ensure that care can be delivered safely to those who need it. £22million of that is recurring funding distributed to local authorities. So we're not waiting for the National Care Service, we're taking action now.

Jeremy Balfour MSP: We don't need to wait for this Bill to pass to deal with these issues. Local government has had funding cuts and I would urge the Scottish Government to better fund local authorities and social work. We need to create a profession where people feel valued and want to stay in the profession. This means giving social workers the resources to do their jobs and the government can do this now.

Paul O'Kane MSP: I don't think we can wait four years for a National Care Service to tackle these issues. It comes back to my point around adequately funding local authorities to support recruitment. And not just social workers but other support functions too. People need time to train and focus on their development but also to protect their health and wellbeing.

Cllr Paul Kelly: We can't wait for a National Care Service to make improvements for social work. The £500million that's been quoted for the NCS should be going to support councils and social work now. Council leaders value the knowledge, commitment and professionalism of social workers and we're planning to work at speed with social workers, professional organisations, councils and national partners on a package of strategic support measures.

Sara Redmond: The Independent Review into Adult Social Care provided a welcome focus on the important role of social care in our communities. Colin described it perfectly in his presentation. And moving towards a community-based profession is going to take cultural change and leadership. For example, changing the narrative around social care. It will take more resourcing but also dialogue to find the right solutions.

5. The National Care Service proposals will see the biggest changes to the social work profession in Scotland in over 50 years. How do we ensure that all social workers have every opportunity to be involved, informed and able to contribute to this important process?

Kevin Stewart MSP: What we're talking about here is change for people who have told us that they need change. And we want the expertise of social workers at the heart of the co-design. We welcome the appointment of an independent adviser on the NCS at SASW which we have funded to enable us to develop the National Care Service with frontline social workers. I would therefore ask all of you to come up with your vision and get involved in the conversation. There are plenty of opportunities to do so and we will let you know about them as we move forward.

Jeremy Balfour MSP: It's important to engage with politicians from the start. Speak to your MSP and tell them what you like and don't like. And ask them to raise questions with the Scottish Government. You are the experts and we depend on hearing your views. Please don't leave it until the very end as most of the changes will be made by then. Engage with all five parties, get your points across to them and hold them to account.

Paul O'Kane MSP: As a member of the committee tasked with scrutinising this legislation, I am clear that we must have social work at the heart of this discussion. We cannot end up in a position where the profession has not been heard. In fact, the discussion is perhaps wider than just the National Care Service. It's about what kind of social work service and system we want in Scotland and how do we encourage more people into the profession.

Cllr Paul Kelly: Councils are absolutely committed to hearing your opinions and events like tonight are helpful. But we have a Bill with so little detail which makes it harder for people to effectively scrutinise and engage with the proposals. And it is perhaps taking time away from discussions about how we address lack of resources now. So we have a Bill that is taking up people's attention instead of discussing how we tackle large caseloads and empower social workers to do their jobs. When the government is cutting funding and putting immense pressure on staff and services, I think we would be better placed engaging social workers on these issues.

Sara Redmond: We need to focus on the change we're seeking to make here. This is too important for us to be focused on our own positions. I think social workers are critical change agents to the change we're trying to bring about. We must encourage curiosity and not create divisions between practitioners and people accessing services. This is a shared vision that we should all be working towards.

Agenda item 5- Group Discussion

Colin Slasberg asked the panel if they agree that, if the NCS is to have human rights at its centre, then the Scottish Government should outline what a life with respected human rights will look like; professionals should identify and cost all needs to realise this vision; and budgets should be set close to the level identified. Kevin Stewart agreed that these are the questions we must ask as part of the co-design for the Charter of Rights and Responsibilities. Sarah Redmond added that we must have accountability mechanisms to monitor whether changes are leading to improvements and sufficient training for staff given how big a change the NCS will be. Paul Kelly

agreed with Colin and said that people should understand their rights and what to expect from social care.

Ben Farrugia commented he believes there is a conflation of the term 'rights' with the duties on public authorities to provide services and he feels it's appropriate to raise this as a point of reflection for the co-design process. He thinks it is dangerous to frame someone not getting a service in a certain area as that local area failing to fulfil their rights. We should frame rights in the most expansive way.

Donna Scott commented that the student bursary for postgraduate social work students is very low when we consider that students are doing 35 hours a week on placement in line with their studies and this is not helping to attract new people to the profession. Kevin Stewart agreed that we need to look at pay and working conditions as we move forward in this process, including in higher education.

Dee Fraser commented that she believes that culture 'eats legislation for breakfast'. So the NCS needs to be an implementation first piece of policy rather than an implementation second. Sara Redmond agreed and added that she would like to see a long term commitment towards focusing on implementation which isn't just about financial resources but creating permissions for change of practice to happen. Paul Kelly said that we should be focusing on these issues now and not become preoccupied with a massive bureaucratic change. Kevin Stewart disagreed that the NCS will be more bureaucratic and instead will be an opportunity to listen to people in order to change culture for the better. This includes shifting the focus on processes to relationships and getting rid of the obsession with risk so that social workers have autonomy in their roles.

Alison concluded the meeting by thanking everyone for their contributions and the panel for a lively and informative discussion. Alison proposed that the group collates the viewpoints from the meeting and submits them to the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee as part of their evidence gathering on the proposed legislation.

Date of Next Meeting- TBC- Secretariat will agree a date with the Convenor's office as the next action and communicate this to members. It is likely to be before the National Care Service Bill goes to stage two.