



# Meeting of the Cross-Party Group on Social Work

Wednesday 19<sup>th</sup> January 2022, 18:00-19:45

Perspectives of Social Work

Minute

Present

MSPs

Fulton MacGregor MSP (Convenor)  
Jeremy Balfour MSP (Deputy Convenor)  
Paul O’Kane MSP (Deputy Convenor)  
Collette Stevenson MSP

Invited guests

Edward McKimm  
Karen Albrow  
Andy Nocker

Non-MSP Group Members

Alison Kier (Royal College of Occupational Therapists)  
Ashley Drennan (Inspiring Scotland)  
Ben Farrugia (Social Work Scotland)

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Dee Fraser (Iriss)  
Fidelma Eggo (Care Inspectorate)  
Flora Aldridge (Social Work Scotland)  
Gary Spolander (Individual Member)  
Hannah Graham (Individual Member)  
Hannah Tweed (Alliance Scotland)  
Sharon Jackson (Heads of School of Social Work)  
Jacqueline Pepper (Social Work Scotland)  
Jennifer Rezendes (Social Work Scotland)  
Jenny Miller (PAMIS)  
Joanne Savege (Scottish Association of Social Work)  
Jessica Nielson (Social Workers Union)  
John McGowan (Social Workers Union)  
John Dalrymple (Radical Visions)  
Jude Currie (Scottish Association of Social Work)  
Judith Turbyne (Children in Scotland)  
Julia Lusk (Individual Member)  
Kirsten Maclean (Inclusion Scotland)  
Laura Caven (COSLA)  
Lorraine Gray (Scottish Social Services Commission)  
Caroline McDonald (Scottish Association of Social Work)  
Megan Farr (Children's Commissioner's Office)  
Oluwatoyin Adenugba (Scottish Association of Social Work)  
Peter Macleod (Care Inspectorate)  
Robert White (Independent Living Fund Scotland)  
Shubhanna Hussain-Ahmed (Coalition of Carers in Scotland)  
Simon Massey (Children in Scotland)  
Lindsey Young (Scottish Association of Social Work)  
Alison Bavidge (Scottish Association of Social Work)  
Louise Vaughan (Scottish Association of Social Work)  
Karin Heber (Scottish Association of Social Work)  
Anne-Marie Monaghan (Scottish Association of Social Work)  
Jonny Adamson (Scottish Association of Social Work)

## Observers

Russell Hogarth  
Mandy Neeson  
Joyce Johnston (Care Inspectorate)  
Julie Paterson (Mental Welfare Commission)  
Christine Sutton (Health Improvement Scotland)

## Apologies

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Moira Tusker (Inclusion Scotland)  
Charlie McMillan (SCLD)  
Susie Dalton (Scottish Women's Aid)  
Iona Colvin (OSCWA)  
David Gibson (Social Work Scotland)

## Agenda item 1- Welcome and Introductions

Fulton MacGregor welcomed everyone to the first meeting of the Cross-Party Group on Social Work and thanked his MSP colleagues who have signed up to the shared aims of the group. Fulton shared his background with the group and explained that he has been a registered social worker since 2004. He added that since social work is spread among so many portfolios in parliament it can often get lost, so he hopes that this group will help to focus legislation and policy. The main purpose of this meeting will be a 'getting to know you' session.

## Agenda item 2- Mentimeter Exercise and Presentations

Anne-Marie Monaghan asked the group to input three words to their mentimeter link to describe what social work means to them. This created a word cloud with a mixture of descriptions that would shape the group discussion later.

### **Presentation One**

Fulton introduced the first speaker of the evening, Edward McKimm, who is a newly qualified social worker, to discuss his expectations of the profession compared to what he has experienced since qualifying. Edward explained that he entered social work with the intention of making a positive difference, but the reality can be that you are very limited. Whilst his university education provided a good overview of the theory behind social work, he did not feel prepared for the realities of the job. Edward described his role as being 'a social mop;' he is expected to mop up the problems. High caseloads are a constant issue as is the volume of administration. This is stopping social workers from being involved in their communities and he has struggled to come to terms with this reality. Edward is constantly faced with the dilemma of whether to prioritise people or paperwork and it is impossible to plan his diary because so much of his time is 'fighting fires.' He was also not fully aware of the amount of 'unofficial hours' he puts in on a regular basis. The risk to social workers' safety, for example, being a lone worker in difficult environments is normalised and downplayed. There is no real understanding of the level of risk that social workers face in their jobs. Edward went on to say that he was only six months qualified when his practice changed instantaneously because of the pandemic. The switch from face-to-face support to online made it harder to build relationships and highlighted the level of digital poverty that exists in Scotland since many families who needed support did not have access to the necessary technology. He does, however, hope that the profession can use the hybrid model of working to its advantage going forward. Fulton thanked

Edward for his presentation and noted how members had agreed with all his points in the chat function.

## **Presentation Two**

Fulton introduced Karen, who is a parent carer, to share her lived experience. Karen explained that she has two sons and her youngest son, who is 15, has profound learning difficulties. While she has a positive relationship with her social worker, this has not always been the case. Karen felt ignored and disrespected by her previous social worker and was made to feel like part of a dysfunctional family, which left her feeling demoralised. She did not know what to do and felt she had to just accept the situation. This led to taking on more work herself and, as a result, Karen was admitted to A&E with exhaustion. This experience has led to Karen becoming a carer representative on her local authority's public server, user and carer group. However, this awful situation could have been different if Karen had been listened to and her request for self-directed support for her son was acted upon instead of instantly dismissed. Karen felt she was judged wrongly and was given no dignity, which led to social work being her enemy rather than an ally. She has since established a very positive relationship with a different social worker and feels she is treated with respect and compassion. Fulton thanked Karen for sharing such an honest account of her situation and highlighted that this brings us back to the importance of trust and relationships in social work practice.

## **Presentation Three**

Fulton introduced Jacqui Pepper, Chief Social Worker at Perth and Kinross Council, and thanked Jacqui for stepping in late to present to the group. Jacqui started by saying that the social work profession itself has not been around for a long time and this makes it challenging to describe and define the role of social workers. Many social workers are reluctant to say what they do as it can often lead to difficult and unwanted conversations. Jacqui then outlined the scope of work involved with being a Chief Social Work Officer. It is often a role that is performed alongside an individual's post within a local authority rather than a job on its own. Distinct social work departments no longer exist, so the role is therefore often held by heads of service who work across a range of structures. It is a privileged position to hold as the individual must provide independent advice to local authority Chief Executives and elected members and they have a significant leadership role in delivering social work services while also having a key role in public protection. Fulton thanked Jacqui for an interesting presentation and took the opportunity to highlight that it is great to have four MSPs in attendance. He paid tribute to Alison, Emily and the SASW team for their organisation.

## **Presentation Four**

Fulton introduced the final speaker of the evening, Andy Nocker, to share his lived experience of social work services. Andy explained that he and his family have been waiting for help from their social work department since 2019 and that his presentation would explain the struggle they have endured to get support. Andy's wife has clinical

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depression, and their three children have all been diagnosed with autism and have a variety of individual needs. In addition, their youngest child (5) is a wheelchair user, their middle child (10) experiences difficulties with his fine and gross motor skills and their eldest (14) suffers from stress and anxiety. Andy was given early redundancy in 2019 and, subsequently, his family was declared homeless. This resulted in a move to temporary accommodation which was unsuitable for his family's needs. They had been moved to a new area without their belongings and no social support, resulting in his three children struggling to cope with the change and his wife experiencing poor mental health. Andy's wife contacted social services to ask for help but they were not considered by the local authority to be in a 'crisis'. How can this not be a crisis? Andy explained that they have now moved to a more secure tenancy, but they still need support. They approached social services again in 2020 to get a Children with Disabilities' Support Worker but they are still on a waiting list for this help. Andy appreciates that the pandemic has had a significant impact on service provision and he knows how over worked the profession is, but he and his family desperately need help. There is an opportunity for parliament to ensure that every person who needs support is given it when needed and provide a service that meets the needs of its users.

Fulton thanked Andy for sharing his personal account and said that he was sorry to hear of the experience that he and his family have had.

## Agenda item 3- Mentimeter Exercise and Group Discussion

Anne-Marie asked the group to access their Mentimeter link again and provide three words to describe what good social work looks like to them? What can we do to make social work better in the context of the new National Care Service that is being proposed? Another word cloud was created.

Anne-Marie passed on to Alison Bavidge who thanked the speakers for sharing a variety of perspectives and experiences of social work. Alison highlighted that the first Mentimeter exercise produced some positive words showing that there is some good work going on. However, the positive was considerably outnumbered by negative words. This contrasted to the wide range of positive words that were found in the second exercise about what social work should be like.

The key question is: what can we do to transition from where we are now to where we want to get to? With the National Care Service being proposed, this is a prime time for a discussion on what we want the future of the social work profession to look like. Alison put the question to the group for open discussion.

Lindsey Young explained that in her job she feels that she must use her personal time and make her own decision to facilitate early intervention since it is not part of her normal working day. If we want to keep that valuable relationship and community-

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based work at the core of the profession, then we need the resources to allow it to happen. This includes upskilling the workforce to ensure they have the necessary tools and ensure that social workers have the time to deliver early intervention as part of their contracted hours.

Peter Macleod thanked the MSPs for attending the meeting and providing sponsorship for the group and said that bringing everyone together is an important first step for making improvements and raising the profile of social work. We need to grab this opportunity to define social work and describe what social workers do. Peter highlighted a policy initiative called 'Changing Lives' which was an attempt to recapture the essence of social work by picking a broad range of contributors to describe their experience of the profession. Could the group look at using something similar to capture our description this way? And is there scope to use parliamentary receptions as a mechanism for building that narrative? Social work is often misunderstood and there is an opportunity to showcase its value and explain what the leadership of social work looks like. Scotland is the only UK nation that does not have a Director of Social Services and not having that leadership level has diluted the profession.

Alison agreed and said there is a divergence between what the profession does now (crisis support and statutory intervention) and what the profession thinks it is (early intervention and support to prevent crises).

Jacqui Pepper concurred with Peter's thoughts and believes that the various legislative and policy changes to social work over many years have led to this increased bureaucracy. So, changing current processes around the edges is not always the answer and it probably needs a bigger approach.

John Dalrymple made the point that we need to remind ourselves where our primary accountability lies. Too often the primary accountability seems to be to the employer rather than the person being served and this needs to be reversed.

Jenny Miller said that there is certainly a question around how we mend those relationships that have been broken and change misunderstandings about the role of social workers. Can we do this through early interventions and having more examples of positive practice experiences?

Russell Hogarth agreed with Edward's point in his presentation on the pressure faced by social workers because of having too much paperwork. He also thanked Karen and Andy for sharing their personal experiences in their presentations as they serve as an opportunity for the group to learn from these stories. He also picked up on Jacqui's point that social workers feel they cannot openly admit to being social workers and emphasised that we need to change this experience. He then said that early intervention works but not enough money is being spent on preventative measures to stop people from reaching crisis point.

Robert White agreed with John's point that loyalty to employers often prevents social workers from being able to deliver the service that they want to. He then made the

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point that the 'Changing Lives' report articulated the role of the social worker perfectly by saying that it is to 'serve the people of Scotland.' It is not about fulfilling statutory interventions and spending time on needless paperwork. We need to get back to supporting social workers to working with people.

Fidelma Eggo said that sadly she is not shocked by the difficult stories the group has heard because she is seen too many of these types of stories in her profession. We are losing good people from the profession because of the disconnect between expectation and reality of the job and yet we have never needed good social workers more than now. The cross-party group is such an important opportunity for us to highlight this to parliament and take forward changes.

Alison agreed and said that we want to use the group to channel views from the profession directly to MSPs.

## Agenda item 4- Concluding Remarks

Fulton explained that the group will meet a minimum of three times a year and gave his assurance to members that it will not be a 'talking shop' but rather a means to engage with MSPs and use parliamentary processes to impact on policy and legislation. He thanked everyone for attending and for the various excellent contributions, including the very powerful presentations.

**Date of Next Meeting-** TBC- Secretariat will agree a date with the Convenor's office as the next action and communicate this to members.