

Summary Briefing of 'Social Work in Scotland' 03/10/16

This briefing summarises the [Social Work in Scotland](#) audit report for a third sector audience. The report has been prepared by Audit Scotland for the Accounts Commission in September 2016.

The aim of the audit was to examine how effectively councils are planning to address the financial and demographic pressures facing social work.

Background

Scottish Councils' Social Work departments provide and fund essential support to some of the most vulnerable people in society. The three main client groups that social work support are Children's services, Adult services and Criminal Justice services. During the period 2014/15 councils funded support for over 300,000 people, around 70% of whom were aged 65 and over. Other people supported by social work and social care in Scotland over 2014/15 included:

- 15,404 looked after children – that is children in the care of their Local Authority.
- 2,751 children on the child protection register – that is a list of children who may be at risk of harm
- 61,500 people who received homecare services
- 36,000 adults in care homes

Social work services have recently been reorganised due to the Public Bodies (Joint Working) (Scotland) Act 2014. The Act requires councils and NHS Boards to create an integration authority to be responsible for the strategic planning of adult social care services. The Act also allows councils to integrate Children's and families' services and criminal justice social work.

Challenges

The current system of social care is unsustainable in Scotland, due to financial pressures caused by a real term reduction in overall council spending, demographic changes, and the cost of implementing new legislation and policies.

Legislation

Councils are implementing a great deal of legislation, some with significant cost implications. Legislation and corresponding cost in a given year include:

- Social Care (Self-Directed Support) (Scotland) Act 2013 – variable across local authority,
- The Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 - £121.8m in 2016-17,
- The Public Bodies (Joint Working) (Scotland) Act 2014 - £5.6m in 2016-17,
- The Carers (Scotland) Act 2016 - £11.3-£12.5m in 2017-18 for Local Authorities and £245 for councils in same period,
- The Community Justice (Scotland) Act 2016 – few financial implications and the UN Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) (Scottish framework and plan) – difficult to predict financial impact but will have significant effect on the way councils deliver services.

Alongside legislation there have been a number of policy developments that require considerable change to the way that social work services are provided. Some of these changes include the increased personalisation of services. Social work professionals need to see people as equal partners in determining their care needs and controlling how they meet their needs which may mean moving away from spending on existing services towards giving people their own budget. This can result in the reduction in use of some services, however, it can be difficult for councils to withdraw existing underused services because of public and political pressures. Other policy developments include an increased focus on prevention and joint working.

Demographics

Social work services face significant demographic challenges with all parts of the population projected to increase. The number of children will increase by 5%, the working age population by 4% and the number of people of pensionable age by 27% by 2037. The overall demand for health and social care will depend significantly on the number of older people and the percentage who require care. Although life expectancy continues to rise, healthy life expectancy (HLE), the number of years people can expect to live in good health, has remained the same since 2008. This means people may require care for longer unless HLE increases.

In 2014/15 44% of the £3.1 billion net social work spending was on services for older people and this percentage is likely to increase with demographic change.

Supporting Looked-after Children (LAC) and child protection has increased demand on social work services. As at July 2015, 17,357 children in Scotland, around 1.8% of the total, were looked after or on the child protection register.

Of these 15,404 were looked-after, 2,751 were on the child protection register and 798 were both. While there has been a recent reduction, possible due to improvements in prevention, the number of LAC has increased by 36% since 2000. The number of children on the child protection register increased by 34% between 2000 and 2015, with 3 in every 1000 children under the age of 16 on the register.

Workforce

Just over 200,000 people work in social work and social care services, representing around 1 in 13 people in employment in Scotland. Almost half work part-time and 85% are women. The private sector is the biggest employer, employing 42% of staff, public sector employing 31% followed very closely by third sector 28%.

Many third and private sector providers feel recruitment is a significant issue for them. The apparent causes include low pay, antisocial hours and difficult working conditions. Some care providers expressed concerns that leaving the EU and the potential introduction of a points based immigration system could create problems for staff recruitment. A 2008 workforce survey indicated that 6.1% of the social care workforce in Scottish care homes for older people were EU – non-UK workers, and a further 7.3% were employed under work permits.

There are skill and staff shortages in several areas of social work and care. 69,690 people work as homecare staff providing housing support or care at home. Both third and private sector providers find it hard to recruit and retain homecare staff. 6,620 registered nurses work in the care sector, 4,930 of them in adult care homes, 91% of these registered nurses are in the private sector. Care providers in both private and third sectors are having trouble recruiting qualified nursing staff for care homes. In December 2014 the number of Mental Health Officers (MHO) was at its lowest since 2005 and after a 2% increase in 2015 the total number of MHOs was 670. However, in 2015 5% of the total number of MHO posts were either unfilled or the post holders were unavailable, for example, through career breaks or secondments.

Unpaid carers

Unpaid carers provide the majority of social care in Scotland. The Scottish Government estimates that there are 759,000 unpaid carers aged 16 and over in Scotland, around 17% of the adult population. Of these, 171,000 – 23% provide care for 35 hours or more a week. In addition, there are an estimated 29,000 young carers under 16, around 14% of the under 16 population. There are many more unpaid carers providing support to people than those in the paid social services workforce. In 2010, the Scottish Government reported that unpaid carers saved the health and social services an estimated £7.68 billion a year. More recently, Carers UK estimated the value of unpaid care in Scotland to be £10.8 billion, more than 3 times current net social work spending.

Financial pressure

Social work services are facing considerable financial pressures. In 2014/15, councils' net spending was £3.1 billion. In 2016/17 councils' total revenue funding, that is the funding used for day-to-day spending, will be 5% lower than in 2015/16. This is a reduction of 11% in real terms since 2011. Against the trend of falling council spending, councils' total social work net spending increased in real terms from £3.2 billion to £3.3 billion between 2010/11 and 2014/15, an average increase of 0.8% a year. As a result, spending on social work increased from 28.9% to 32% of council spending. An analysis of council accounts found that two thirds of councils reported social work budget overspends totaling £40 million in 2014/15.

Audit Scotland has calculated the lower and upper limits of the cost of demographic change based on Scottish Government projects as well as cost pressures arising from legislation and commitment to living wage.

Exhibit 7

Potential financial pressures facing Scottish councils by 2019/20
Councils face significant cost pressures.

Reason for cost increase	Lower limit (£ million)	Upper limit (£ million)
 Demographic change (older people only)	£141	£287
 The Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014	£98	£98
 The Carers (Scotland) Act 2016	£72	£83
 The Living Wage	£199	£199
Potential cost increase by 2019/20	£510	£667

Source: Audit Scotland analysis of financial memorandums and information provided by the Scottish Government

Together they imply increases in social work spending of between £510 million and £667 million (a 16-21% increase) by 2020.

Councils plan to save £54 million from social work budgets in 2016/17, by changing how they provide services. For example, most councils only provide services for people aged over 65 who are assessed as being critical or at substantial risk. The £250 million allocated by Scottish Government to Health and Social Care Integration Authorities to support social care may partially relieve some of these pressures.

How councils are addressing the challenges

Councils have adopted a number of strategies to achieve savings by tightening eligibility criteria so that fewer people receive services and targeting funding to people in greatest need. They have also achieved significant savings in the cost of homecare and care homes through competitive tendering and the national care home contract. However, there are risks that reducing costs further could affect the quality of services.

There has been a limited shift to more prevention and different models of care. Many councils have taken an "opportunistic or piecemeal" approach to changing how they deliver services, often to meet financial challenges or as the result of initiative funding by the Scottish Government.

Opportunities for people who use social work services and carers to be involved in planning services are limited, and there is scope for more involvement. Service providers also have an important role to play in commissioning services, and councils are not doing enough to work with them to design services based around user needs.

The Scottish Government's Living Wage commitment provides an opportunity to improve recruitment and retention of social care staff, and to create a more stable skilled workforce. But it adds to the financial pressures on councils and providers.

Health and Social Care Integration Implications

The integration of health and social care has made governance arrangements more complex, but regardless of integration, councils retain statutory responsibilities in relation to social work services.

Elected members have important leadership and scrutiny roles in councils. It is essential that elected members assure themselves that service quality is maintained and that risks are managed effectively. Elected members have a key role to play in a wider conversation with the public about service priorities and managing people's expectations of social work and social care services that councils can afford to provide in the future. The Scottish Government also has an important role to play in setting the overall context of the debate.

With integration and other changes over recent years, the key role of the Chief Social Work Officer (CSWO) has become more complex and challenging. Councils need to ensure that CSWOs have the status and capacity to enable them to fulfil their statutory responsibilities effectively.

The full report can be accessed at:

<http://www.audit-scotland.gov.uk/report/social-work-in-scotland>