



## **Not waving but drowning Paperwork and pressure in adult social work services – SUMMARY**

There has recently been an intense focus on the role of social work in protecting vulnerable children – but UNISON believes it is equally crucial to look at social work services for adults. Our survey attracted 267 responses from people working at the front-line across the UK in a wide range of settings.

Keeping adults who find themselves in vulnerable circumstances safe and well is vitally important to society. We believe that it is time to re-affirm and champion the importance of social work with adults. Our report comes against the backdrop of restructuring around moves to personalisation and self-directed support – and an increasingly complex set of legal and practice responsibilities shouldered by social workers in mental health services.

### **Resources for adult social work services**

Nearly two thirds of respondents believe that social work services for adults are now worse resourced than they were five years ago. Only 1 in 10 believe the resource position has improved.

### **Systems and procedures for safeguarding adults**

Some 62% of respondents believe that systems and procedures for safeguarding adults have improved over the last five years. However there is a strong view among respondents that the way personalisation policies are being implemented through cash for care schemes, risks reversing this trend. Many believe this will bring a rise in adult protection cases.

### **Time available to spend with individual service users**

Two thirds of respondents feel the time they have available to spend with each service user is not sufficient to meet their needs. Nearly a quarter feel that the time available is very insufficient.

### **Time spent on paperwork**

An overwhelming 96% of respondents believe that too much of their time is spent on paperwork.

## **The impact of performance targets**

Three quarters of respondents believe that current performance targets have a negative impact on outcomes for service users.

## **The effectiveness of joint working with the NHS**

Only a third of respondents believe that joint working with the NHS is effective in their area. A third are neutral about the issue while a third rate joint working as ineffective. A significant number of respondents are employed by or seconded to an NHS employer. They report real structural difficulties such as remote management, marginalisation of social work and incompatibility of IT systems requiring duplication of paperwork.

## **Vacancy rates on social work teams**

Three out of five respondents are working in teams where over 10% of social work posts are vacant. Over a quarter report a vacancy rate on their team of over 20%. One in ten are in teams with over 30% of posts vacant.

## **Average caseloads**

Some 86% of respondents report that average caseloads for social workers in their team have increased over the last five years.

## **Access to adequate professional supervision**

A quarter of respondents describe access to professional supervision within their teams as inadequate or poor. Only a third of respondents say supervision in their team is good. A further third say it is adequate while one in ten are neutral on the issue.

## **Impact of direct payments/personal budgets roll-out**

Respondents were asked to give their views on the likely impact of their employer's approach to rolling out direct payments or personal budgets. The most widely cited outcomes are that it will lead to fewer social work posts; with de-skilling and decreased job satisfaction for social workers – on the one hand. On the other hand greater empowerment for service users is also frequently cited. However this is tempered by fears that this might not apply for some – particularly those lacking capacity, family support or other resources.

## **WHAT IS REALLY GOING ON WITH 'PERSONALISATION'?**

Our survey asked for in-depth feedback about what is really happening on the ground from a social work point of view with the roll-out of personalisation schemes. Ten key themes emerged:

1. Recognition of the positive potential of personal budgets or direct payments for some.

2. Roll-out in the current cash-strapped funding environment raises fears about rationing, cost cutting and more responsibility passed over to families.
3. Emerging one size fits all approach to personalisation driven by performance targets which only measure crude numbers signed up. The organisational focus is on process rather than outcomes.
4. Quality and availability of local care and support services may suffer through closure of community facilities and market deficiencies.
5. Deregulation, casualisation and privatisation leading to an increase in safeguarding cases.
6. Increase in bureaucracy, paperwork and workload.
7. Loss of social work jobs through restructuring/replacement with cheaper staff.
8. Changing and narrowing of social work role with the loss of ability to provide high quality and holistic assessment, support and advocacy.
9. Complexity and uncertainty surrounding lines of accountability and responsibility is undermining confidence.
10. Inadequate training and information for staff.

## **UNISON's 10 point plan to improve adult social work services**

Based on the responses to this survey and consultation with our social work activists, UNISON has developed a 10 point plan for adult social work services:

### **1. PLANNED PROGRAMME OF INVESTMENT**

Covering safeguarding and preventative services so that more staff can be employed, with better pay and working conditions, better support systems and the right tools to do the job.

### **2. CLEAR POLITICAL COMMITMENT TO STRENGTHEN THE ROLE OF SOCIAL WORK IN ADULT SERVICES INCLUDING THE PERSONALISATION AGENDA**

Clear statements through Government policy and regulation channels about the central importance of social work in care and support of adults, and commitment to halting the development of 'social work on the cheap'.

### **3. URGENT ACTION PLAN TO FILL VACANCIES**

Including:

- Revival of on-the-job schemes which fund assistants, care managers and others to gain their social work qualification.

- Employer 'guarantee' of good working conditions covering caseload, working hours, tackling stress, health and safety, counselling and support, training and development, pay progression, good office accommodation and IT kit.
- 'Bank' staffing pools run and owned by groups of local authorities to provide reliable and cost-effective relief staff cover.

#### **4. MORE SOCIAL WORKERS AND SUPPORT STAFF BASED ON OPTIMUM STAFFING MODELS**

Which can assess the right staffing numbers and skill mix against local population numbers and needs. The staffing model should include all in social work teams including skilled administrators. Extra capacity is needed in teams for support, mentoring and development activities and for staff to have enough time to work directly with service users.

#### **5. CULL OF BUREAUCRACY AND PERFORMANCE TARGETS, MORE CONTACT WITH SERVICE USERS**

Through:

- A root and branch zero-based review of all bureaucracy and consideration of measures used to cut red tape in schools.
- Overhaul of performance indicators which skew priorities.
- Investment in skilled and well-rewarded administrators.
- Agreed targets for reversing the 80%-paperwork–20%-contact split.
- Overhaul of defective IT case recording systems.
- Devolved budgets so practitioners can sign off small expenditure.

#### **6. NATIONAL STANDARDS ON ACCEPTABLE CASELOADS**

With adjustments for types and complexity of cases and other work demands, enforced through the inspection process and regularly audited by the council or Trust leadership, with sanctions against employers who breach the Code of Practice for Social Care Employers.

#### **7. BETTER SUPPORT AND MORE REFLECTIVE PRACTICE**

Consistent, high quality supervision that is both supportive and challenging, focuses on the needs of the worker, not the organisation's performance indicators and builds in time for reflection and mentoring.

## **8. BETTER PAY AND CAREER STRUCTURES**

To reward expertise and experience in practice rather than exit to management and to redress the devaluing of social work compared with pay in other professions.

## **9. REVIEW OF THE POSITION OF SOCIAL WORK IN HEALTH SETTINGS**

With a view to:

- Removing structural barriers to effective joint working.
- Strengthening the status and representation of social work at all levels within NHS organisations.
- Creating a true partnership of equals.

## **10. CHANGE OF MANAGEMENT CULTURE**

Rooting out bullying and 'blame culture' in favour of an enabling and supportive management based on professional respect. Giving staff more involvement, consultation and say in policy and practice development.