

Summary

Social work in Scotland



ACCOUNTS COMMISSION 

Prepared by Audit Scotland
September 2016


The Accounts Commission

The Accounts Commission is the public spending watchdog for local government. We hold councils in Scotland to account and help them improve. We operate impartially and independently of councils and of the Scottish Government, and we meet and report in public.

We expect councils to achieve the highest standards of governance and financial stewardship, and value for money in how they use their resources and provide their services.

Our work includes:

- securing and acting upon the external audit of Scotland's councils and various joint boards and committees
- assessing the performance of councils in relation to Best Value and community planning
- carrying out national performance audits to help councils improve their services
- requiring councils to publish information to help the public assess their performance.

You can find out more about the work of the Accounts Commission on our website: www.audit-scotland.gov.uk/about/ac 

Audit Scotland is a statutory body set up in April 2000 under the Public Finance and Accountability (Scotland) Act 2000. We help the Auditor General for Scotland and the Accounts Commission check that organisations spending public money use it properly, efficiently and effectively.

Summary



Background




In 2014/15, councils' net spending on social work services was £3.1 billion. Services for older people made up around 44 per cent of this spending, and services for children and families around 28 per cent. A range of other services make up the remainder. Just over 200,000 people work in social work and social care, around one in 13 people in employment in Scotland. In addition, there are 759,000 unpaid carers aged 16 and over in Scotland, 17 per cent of the adult population, and 29,000 young carers under 16. Carers UK estimated the value of unpaid care in Scotland to be £10.8 billion, more than three times current social work net spending.

Scottish councils' social work departments provide and fund essential support to some of the most vulnerable people in society. They supported and protected over 300,000 people in 2014/15, around 70 per cent of whom were aged 65 and over. Social work provides a wide range of services ([Exhibit 1](#)). These aim to improve the quality of people's lives and help them to live more independently.




Exhibit 1

Social work and social care services


Social work provides a variety of services to protect and support people in three client groups.





Children's services 	Adult services 	Criminal Justice services 
Support for families	Residential care	Offender services
Child protection	Care at home	Providing social enquiry reports
Adoption services	Day care	Supervision of community payback and unpaid work
Kinship care	Hospital discharge coordination	Supporting families of prisoners
Fostering	Adult support and protection	Supervision of offenders on licence
Child care agencies	Mental health and addiction services	
Looked-after young people	Dementia and Alzheimer's services	
Day care	Supporting people with disabilities	
Residential care	Services to support carers	

Cont.

Children's services 	Adult services 	Criminal Justice services 
Child and adolescent mental health	Provision of aids and adaptations	
Supporting child refugees	Re-ablement services	
Supporting trafficked children	Supported living	
Support for young people involved in offending behaviour	Supporting refugee families	
Support for children with disabilities and their families	Supporting victims of people trafficking	
	Intermediate care	

Source: Audit Scotland

The full audit report is available to download [Social work in Scotland](#)  with four supplements to accompany the report:

- [Supplement 1](#)  presents the findings of our survey of service users and carers.
- [Supplement 2](#)  lists advisory group members, who gave advice and feedback at important stages of the audit. It also describes the detailed audit methodology, the roles and responsibilities of the key social work organisations and social work legislation.
- [Supplement 3](#)  describes the governance and scrutiny arrangements in each of our fieldwork councils, providing an illustration of the variety and complexity of arrangements across Scotland.
- [Supplement 4](#)  is a self-assessment checklist for elected members.

Current approaches to delivering social work services will not be sustainable in the long term. There are risks that reducing costs further could affect the quality of services. Councils and Integration Joint Boards (IJBs) need to work with the Scottish Government, which sets the overall strategy for social work across Scotland, to make fundamental decisions about how they provide services in the future. They need to work more closely with service providers, people who use social work services and carers to commission services in a way that makes best use of the resources and expertise available locally. They also need to build communities' capacity to better support vulnerable local people to live independently in their own homes and communities.

Councils have adopted a number of strategies to achieve savings; they have tightened eligibility criteria so that fewer people receive services and targeted funding to people in greatest need. For example, the proportion of people aged 65 and over receiving homecare has fallen from just under 70 per 1,000 in 2006

to just over 50 per 1,000 in 2015. They have also achieved significant savings in the cost of homecare and care homes through commissioning and competitive tendering. Costs for these services have fallen in real terms by 7.2 per cent and 10 per cent respectively between 2010/11 and 2014/15.

Although councils want to deliver more preventative services, there has been a limited shift to prevention, different models of care or better tapping into the support available from the wider community. There has been little in the way of fundamental change in the way councils deliver services. Many councils have taken an opportunistic or piecemeal approach to change, often to meet financial challenges or as the result of initiative funding by the Scottish Government.

Councils and IJBs need to instigate a frank and wide-ranging debate with their communities about the long-term future for social work and social care in their area to meet statutory responsibilities, given the funding available and the future challenges. Elected members need to engage with communities in a wider dialogue about council priorities. At a higher level, there is a key role for the Scottish Government as they set policy and councils need to work with the Scottish Government, COSLA, the Scottish Local Government Partnership, Social Work Scotland and other stakeholders to review how to provide social work services for the future and future funding arrangements.

Currently, opportunities for people who use social work services and carers to be involved in planning services are limited. There is scope for councils and IJBs to do more to work with them to design, commission, deliver and evaluate services to achieve better outcomes. Service providers also have an important role to play in contributing to commissioning and councils need to do more to work with them to design services based around user needs.

Councils and their community planning partners need to do more to promote and empower communities. This includes working with them to design, commission, deliver and evaluate services to achieve better outcomes, and to build capacity to allow communities to do more to support themselves.

Councils' social work departments are facing significant challenges because of a combination of financial pressures caused by a real-terms reduction in overall council spending, demographic change, and the cost of implementing new legislation and policies. If councils and integration joint boards (IJBs) continue to provide services in the same way, we have estimated that these changes require councils' social work spending to increase by between £510 and £667 million by 2020 (a 16–21 per cent increase).

Since 2011/12, councils' total revenue funding has reduced by 11 per cent in real terms. Over the same period, councils' social work spending increased by three per cent in real terms and now accounts for almost a third of overall council spending. The financial and service challenges facing social work include:

- reductions in councils' budgets
- difficulties social care service providers have in recruiting and retaining suitably qualified staff, particularly homecare staff and nursing staff

- implementing a wide range of legislation and policy changes aimed at improving services, better supporting carers and improving outcomes for people (estimated to cost between £170 million and £181 million per year by 2020)
- creating integration authorities responsible for the governance, planning and resourcing of adult social care services, as required under the Public Bodies (Joint Working) (Scotland) Act 2014. (The Act also allows councils to integrate other areas of activity, such as children's health and social care services and criminal justice social work)
- paying the Living Wage to adult care workers in private and third sector organisations contracted to provide services (estimated to cost an additional £199 million per year by 2020)
- meeting increased demand associated with demographic change, particularly people living longer with health and care needs (estimated to cost an additional £141 to £287 million per year by 2020).

Each IJB is required to produce a strategic plan that includes strategies for all the services delegated to it. Strategies are set out in various ways depending on the health and social care arrangements in each council. While the plans for integrated services were well developed, they are new and untested.

The integration of health and social care has resulted in complex and varied governance arrangements for social work services. Elected members have key leadership and scrutiny roles, and it is important that they receive training and guidance on the operation of the new governance arrangements. Councils and IJBs need to ensure that the governance and scrutiny of social work services are appropriate and comprehensive across the whole of social work services, and review these arrangements regularly as partnerships develop and services change.

Council representation on IJBs is usually four or five senior elected members, generally including the leader of the council and a senior opposition member. This means that a small subset of elected members of the council and members of the local NHS board will be responsible for social work governance and scrutiny within the IJB and its committees. There is a risk that the majority of elected members could feel excluded from social work decision-making and scrutiny. There is also a risk that this arrangement leaves responsibility for governance and scrutiny with a small number of very busy elected members.

Each IJB is required to produce a strategic plan that includes strategies for all the services delegated to it. It is important that there are clear links between the planning of those services that are integrated and those that are not, for example, the transition from children's services to adult services or between children's services and criminal justice. Planning for these transitions needs to be well coordinated to ensure a seamless service without overlaps or gaps in services, particularly where responsibility is shared between the IJB and the council.

Elected members may find that their role changes, but they remain the key decision-makers for social work services on behalf of their constituents and they ensure effective scrutiny, governance and strategic oversight of the new arrangements. It is essential that elected members assure themselves of the quality of social work services and ensure councils manage risks effectively at a

time of great change. With increasing financial pressures, councillors may face a difficult challenge in managing people's expectations, but they have a crucial role in doing so and providing leadership for their communities.

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.

Councils must appoint a chief social work officer (CSWO) who is responsible for professional leadership of the social work service. The CSWO should have access to the chief executive and other senior managers, councillors and social work officers. The role of the CSWO has changed significantly in recent years and there are risks that CSWOs may have too many roles and have insufficient status to enable them to fulfil their statutory responsibilities effectively.

CSWO annual reports are also important in providing a high-level summary of the performance of social work functions during a particular year. It is essential that they are subject to effective scrutiny by elected members. However, we did not find evidence of detailed scrutiny of the report or challenge at these meetings.

What needs to happen

Councils and IJBs should instigate a frank and wide-ranging debate with their communities about the long-term future for social work and social care in their area. They should work with the Scottish Government, COSLA (or the Scottish Local Government Partnership (SLGP)), Social Work Scotland and other stakeholders to review how to provide social work services for the future and future funding arrangements. Councils also need to work more closely with service providers, people who use social work services and carers to commission services in a co-operative way that makes best use of the resources and expertise available locally.


Councils and IJBs should ensure that the governance, scrutiny and management of risks within social work services is appropriate and comprehensive across the whole of social work services, and review these arrangements regularly as partnerships develop and services change. Councils should demonstrate clear access for, and reporting to, the council by the CSWO, in line with guidance and ensure the CSWO has sufficient time and authority to enable them to fulfil the role.

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