NIASW

N.IRELAND ASSOCIATION OF SOCIAL WORKERS

(PART OF BASW)

A Blueprint for Change

For Adult Services Social Work in Northern Ireland

CONTENTS ▶▶▶▶▶

FOREWORD ▶▶▶▶▶▶

For too long the 'voice of social work' in the UK has remained barely audible.

This is something of which social workers, in adult services in Northern Ireland, have been acutely aware.

Over the past 20 years the profession has risen to the challenges presented by the introduction of new models of care through *Care Management* and later *Integrated Care*, on the understanding that these initiatives would provide better choice, control and seamless delivery for the service user.

There was an acceptance of the break-up of professional management structure to enable greater efficiency; effective and collaborative inter-professional working. To ensure the good governance of the profession, assurances were sought on the provision, for social work staff, of structures which delivered unbroken lines of professional social work accountability, access to professional supervision and support in maintaining continuous professional development. All of these, however, have proven to be the casualties of repeated restructuring and financial pressures.

The consequence of models designed to deliver better inter-professional working has been a much diminished professional social work identity. There is a loss of confidence among many social workers in their ability to convince their healthcare colleagues of the unique contribution which only they can make. Social workers struggle to reconcile the requirements of the professional Code of Ethics with the demands of roles where client choice and personal control are under major threat.

The voices of adult services social workers in Northern Ireland have been heard and documented through this survey. While their concerns are unsettling, this initiative has provided these professionals with a platform, not only to express their fears and frustrations, but to put forward credible solutions.

I welcome the launch of *A Blueprint for Change* and commend it as a means to strengthen the delivery of social work in adult services for the immeasurable benefit of service users.

Lesley McDowell
Chair, NIASW

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY ▶▶▶▶▶▶

This report lays out a blueprint for the future of social work in adult services in Northern Ireland and outlines the key challenges identified by social work staff working in this arena. These can be summarised as:

- **Maintaining and promoting the social work role**
  "It feels like the role of social work is not valued, as we are perceived as 'form fillers', almost an intermediary way for service users to get services"

- **Excessive bureaucracy**
  "Paperwork and duplication of assessment records is totally unmanageable"

- **Lack of resources & resource led services**
  "You are basically begging for resources and it is not leads-led but resource led"

- **Workload**
  "Not enough social workers to carry out the number of assessments coming in, people left at risk"

Importantly, this report offers real world solutions to the challenges social workers face every day. It was clear through the survey and subsequent consultation meetings with adult services social workers that they want to spend more time undertaking direct face-to-face therapeutic interventions with service users and those who care for them.

In order for that to happen the challenges identified above will need to be alleviated or resolved. This report is the profession's answer to the problems identified.

Although it has been compiled based on the experiences of social workers in Northern Ireland, as part of a UK organisation NIASW is aware that the issues raised are common throughout the United Kingdom.

The BASW publication, *The State of Social Work* (2012), identifies similar challenges: "Let social workers get back to what they do best: Immediate measures are needed to reallocate local authority administration staff from less critical roles into children and adult service teams to ensure social workers are relieved of the admin tasks they tell us are preventing them from doing their work."

NIASW wants to see this report used as a platform for debate about the role of adult social work across the United Kingdom.

Adult services social work in Northern Ireland has undergone some major changes in recent years. The policy context of supporting care in the community has become more problematic as a result of a reduction in funding for the provision of services aimed at maintaining service users in their own homes.

Most health and social care trusts have embraced integrated multi-disciplinary teams and a move away from professional line management structures. The volume of adult safeguarding referrals has increased dramatically and the resulting activity has elevated demands on social work staff who take the lead in many of these cases.

The *Blueprint for Change* was developed from a survey of social workers from all programmes of care within adult services across statutory and voluntary sectors in Northern Ireland. It was not limited to NIASW members.

In order to translate the survey findings into specific recommendations for change and improvement NIASW hosted a series of consultation meetings with social workers from four of the five health and social care trusts and the voluntary sector. The participants were representative of the range of work settings and client groups that make up social work in adult services. In total, more than 400 social workers participated, representing a significant percentage of the social work adult care workforce.

The consultation meetings were held to examine the survey findings and explore solutions to the challenges identified by respondents. An overview of the survey findings were shared at the meetings, offering useful context and information.

This report seeks to share the proposals and solutions put forward during the consultation meetings in respect of the main challenges currently faced by social work in adult services.

The consultation questions were developed around the four key challenges most commonly identified by survey respondents. The four major challenges identified by respondents to the survey are:

1. **Maintaining and promoting the social work role**

2. **Excessive bureaucracy & NISAT (the Northern Ireland Single Assessment Tool)**

3. **Lack of resources & resource led services**

4. **Workload**

Respondents were asked which of a range of issues prevented them from spending time in face-to-face work with clients. The three most pressing issues identified overall were recording onto client notes (76%), responding to unplanned crises (76%) and completing forms to access services (66%).

Feedback from social workers in adult services has highlighted that current pressures are placing them at risk of breaching their professional obligations, enshrined in the BASW Code of Ethics and in regulatory employee conduct standards. Eighty per cent of respondents highlighted that they are working in excess of their contracted hours just to keep on top of their work demands, with 66% working 20 additional unpaid hours each month.

This cannot be allowed to continue. Change must happen, and it must happen soon.

It is against this background that NIASW shares these solution-focused recommendations, with the intention of positively influencing the implementation of the Northern Ireland administration's Ten Year Strategy for Social Work and to make sure the voice of social work is central to any change process.

◆ Recommendations

Maintaining and promoting the social work role

This report identifies a need to:

1   Develop a clear, inclusive and regionally recognised definition of the adult social work role which incorporates the unique aspects of social work in adult services as a profession. This process must be owned by the profession across all sectors and shared and entrenched in social work training and practice.

2   Develop career progression for social workers in adult services, which includes a specialist senior professional practice role. NIASW would like to see the Principal Social Worker role currently in place within children's services extended into the adult sector.

3   Examine the discrepancy between statutory and voluntary sector terms and conditions for social work staff, which have been inequitable since the implementation of Agenda For Change in the statutory sector.

4   Encourage, support and fund voluntary sector organisations to facilitate completion of the Assessed Year in Employment (AYE).

5   Audit the strength of current social work line management structures and address the lack of social work applicants at team leader level within health and social care trusts. NIASW will undertake to do this work in conjunction with the Executive Directors of Social Work.

6   Establish a Regional Social Work Forum to provide a mechanism to share good practice and learning.

7   Develop and establish a mentor scheme model for social work, initially to be available to newly qualified social workers and line managers.

8   Increase evidence-based practice to ensure the Post Qualifying (PQ) Framework/Professional in Practice (PiP) is accessible and serves to support professional practice.

9   Raise the profile of the profession with media and the public through joint public information campaigns about the role of social work, with a dedicated website, advertising and a launch event. Titled 'What Social Work Does For Us', the initiative should bring together NIASW, DHSSPS, the health and social care boards and NISCC to give a week of focus on the difference social work makes to people's lives.

9a   Focus a part of What Social Work Does For Us on social work employers, encouraging social workers to talk publicly about the sort of work they do, to change the current culture in which the need for confidentiality is confused with secrecy and a complete lack of public engagement.

10   For the DHSSPS to write to all Assembly members to urge them to take part in NIASW's Social Work Placement Scheme for politicians, giving first hand insight into a day in the life of a Northern Ireland social worker.

Excessive bureaucracy

11   Review current recording requirements, including expectations on the input of statistics, with a view to introducing practical measures which will reduce unnecessary paperwork and duplication.

12 Ensure that social work teams have adequate administration support. At present too many social workers spend large amounts of time carrying out non-social work tasks. NIASW recommends that Trusts ensure administration workers input all brokerage data [see case study on page 17].

13 Explore increased use of IT systems and technology solutions as a means of enabling social workers to spend significantly more time engaged in therapeutic face-to-face interventions with people who use services, ensuring capacity building and training are provided to those who need it.

14 Review the current Northern Ireland Single Assessment Tool (NISAT) system and implementation.

Lack of resources/Resource led service

15 Pilot and evaluate the family group conferencing model in adult services.

16 Focus on prevention to decrease the need for service provision. Ensure social workers have time to meaningfully interact with clients and carers, which includes reducing paperwork and bureaucracy requirements.

17 Explore a wider and more established community development model which facilitates clients being cared for and integrated into their own communities in a more meaningful way and also reduces the need for statutory services. Support people to make decisions about living with risk, include positive risk taking and capacity assessments.

18 To reduce the pressure on statutory services by developing a regional scoping exercise of voluntary and community services which would help to identify what is currently available in each part of Northern Ireland and where there may be capacity to support overstretched areas.

Workload

19 Develop a standardised regional caseload weighting system across all programmes of care and settings in adult services. This should be audited regularly.

20 Develop one single referral form for use by all services. There should be a pilot in one trust area to measure time saved and improvements secured for service users.

21 Share regional learning to enable systems which are working to be adopted by other teams and agencies where caseloads are unacceptably high.

22 Reduce the need for paperwork and free up social work time to respond to client need.

23 Review the capacity for current electronic systems to accurately capture social work activity in case recording.

24 NIASW recommends that significant change is required to the current system of holding employers to account and to clarifying who will act when employers breach the Code of Practice for Employers of Social Care Workers by continuously requiring social workers to work at unsafe levels.

BACKGROUND TO THE REPORT ▶▶▶▶▶

At the date of writing there were over 5,680 social workers across both children and adult services registered in Northern Ireland and nearly 16,000 social care workers. A further 715 student social workers were also registered. Social Work is a protected title, protected by law, and is regulated by the Northern Ireland Social Care Council (NISCC).

> *"Social workers work primarily, although not exclusively, with some of the most vulnerable and marginalised people in society. They work with people who may have difficulty living within the commonly accepted norms of society or who lack the means to do so and who may also have personal, social, physical or mental problems and are in need of support, care, protection or control. Social workers work in partnership with other public services, such as health, education, housing, police, and probation, and with the voluntary and independent sectors to promote and safeguard, and where appropriate to protect, the social wellbeing and safety of individuals, families and communities."*
>
> Improving and Safeguarding Social Wellbeing:
> A Strategy for Social Work in Northern Ireland, 2012-2022

Social work in adult services settings in Northern Ireland tends to be delivered in programmes of care and respondents to the NIASW survey and subsequent consultation meetings came from those working with older people, people with learning and physical disabilities, mental health conditions and those operating in acute hospital settings. We also engaged with managers and social services trainers as part of this process.

The social work role in adult services settings is as diverse as the needs of the various client groups it seeks to serve. As well as being responsible for assessment of need, intervention, care planning, service provision and review, adult services social work also fulfils the key role in safeguarding adults who are vulnerable to abuse. This area of work has increased dramatically in recent years, as has the number of safeguarding cases reported to health and social care trusts.

Risk assessment and risk management are key features of the social work role, as is finding a balance between care and control. Adult service provision needs to take into account issues such as capacity, choice, independence and dignity.

As with childcare social work, adult services social workers reported regularly working additional unpaid overtime to ensure the safety and wellbeing of their clients.

Eighty per cent of respondents reported working more than their contracted weekly hours on a regular basis. Of these, 66% reported working up to 20 additional hours each month and a further 5% reported working between 40 and 60 additional hours per month.

> *"Even with working overtime I feel that I am only able to get the very basic and essential level of input with the service user and do not feel that I have time to do my work to a satisfactory level"*
>
> *Social work practitioner*

Proposals to further develop the community based delivery of social care in Northern Ireland have huge implications for social work staff in adult services settings. The Department of Health, Social Services and Personal Safety has laid out the direction of future care in its review of health and social care in Northern Ireland, *Transforming Your Care* (TYC), and the impact has already been felt across residential and day care settings. Whilst the full impact has not been established it is fair to say that if this course is followed it will bring further radical changes to the way social work operates within adult services settings across Northern Ireland.

The concept of community based care is not a new one and has been in place in many guises for several decades now. As an ideology it is central to social work practice and the ideas of choice, dignity, respect and quality care available free at the point of need is fully in line with core social work values. NIASW feels that such developments bring huge opportunities for social workers and their service users, and we want to see social workers leading the way.

In addition, the 10 Year Strategy for Social Work in NI is the first of its kind in the United Kingdom and offers an exciting opportunity to develop and strengthen the social work profession.

However, the not inconsiderable challenges which face social work services in 2014, and which we highlight here, could mean that these opportunities are lost. In this report we set out how social work can take up this leadership role in delivering the care people in Northern Ireland need and want.

MAINTAINING AND PROMOTING
THE SOCIAL WORK ROLE ▶▶▶▶▶▶

Provision of holistic, needs-led services requires a high level of co-operation and co-ordination between professionals and organisations. The structure of how this communication and coordination happens has been changing in recent years. Within an integrated health and social care system in Northern Ireland social workers have traditionally been based in social work teams comprised solely of social work staff and managed by a social work line management structure.

In recent years integrated multi-disciplinary teams have been developed where a range of professionals work together in one team to provide an integrated service. These teams are managed by a member of one profession who is responsible for operationally supervising all team members. This is supplemented for social workers by professional supervision from a staff member who is from the social work profession.

75% of survey respondents identified that they work in integrated multi-disciplinary teams while the remaining 25% worked in social work teams.

Strong feedback across adult services staff through the survey pointed to a lack of common identity within the Adult Services Social Work role. Many reported that they felt other disciplines were not aware of the unique contribution social work has to make in an holistic plan of care for adult service users. Where present, the Medical Model of care seems to prevail. Social work in adult settings is diverse in nature and the needs of each client group differ substantially.

Social workers stated:

> *"The primary challenge is the constant battle around the notion of social worker v generalist practitioner and the need to be continually re-asserting the same. This is where the need for a strong articulate professional body such as NIASW is so crucial."*

> *"Sometimes a lack of clarity about what makes the social work role different from other professionals as everyone seems to be doing much the same thing. A lack of understanding by other professionals about the social work role – they think we are all experts in issues such as social security benefits."*

This theme was reiterated strongly during the consultation meetings and participants identified the following range of recommendations to help strengthen social work identity and role within adult services settings.

1   **Develop a clear, inclusive and regionally recognised definition of the adult social work role which incorporates the unique aspects of social work in adult services as a profession. This process must be owned by the profession across all sectors and shared and entrenched in social work training and practice.**

Any definition of social work will need to capture the diverse roles, e.g. holistic assessment, community development, use of social work skills as a resource, family mediation, psychosocial counselling and loss and bereavement counselling. This piece of work is compatible with the framework of the social work strategy remit and is one which NIASW would wish to lead on. As such NIASW is currently establishing

local Voice of Social Work Groups. NIASW will bring together the combined social work community and gift the work to the social work strategy. This definition of social work in adult care will help promote the profession and its profile and will hopefully unify a sometimes disparate profession.

2   **Develop career progression for social workers in adult services, which includes specialist senior professional practice role, NIASW would like to see the Principal Social Worker role currently in place within children's services extended into the adult sector.**

The post of Principal Social Work Practitioner within children's social work service has allowed for career progression opportunities for social workers who do not want to progress through a management route. It also provides recognition of the specialist nature of childcare social work. By bringing this post into adult services settings the same opportunity and recognition would be achieved. The role could be utilised to give clear leadership to the profession outside of the traditional management structure. As more social workers are now entering the workforce directly into adult services they require more development in relation to their sense of social work identity; they can frequently be the only social worker in their team and as such need to learn how to consolidate their social work practice from others.

3   **Examine the discrepancy between statutory and voluntary sector terms and conditions for social work staff which have been inequitable since the implementation of Agenda For Change in the Statutory sector.**

As budgets are reduced within Health and Social Care Trusts an increased number of qualifying social workers are finding employment within the voluntary sector. Despite many of these roles being of a specialist nature disparity exists regarding the terms and conditions which the voluntary sector are funded to provide. In line with maintaining and promoting the social work role it would be important to encourage commissioners to recognise and fund social work posts at an equal Agenda for Change pay grading.

This work could be undertaken within the Social Work Strategy as there is a Voluntary Sector Forum. NIASW would be happy to work with this group to agree how to take the recommendation forward.

4   **Encourage, support and fund voluntary sector organisations to facilitate completion of Assessed Year in Employment (AYE).**

Following on from Recommendation 3 it would be important to enable the growing number of social workers gaining employment in the voluntary sector to complete their AYE. For those posts which fit the Northern Ireland Social Care Council criteria support and funding should be provided to enable successful completion of AYE. NIASW would be keen to explore how this can be actioned with the Voluntary Sector Forum and the Northern Ireland Social Care Council.

5   **Audit the strength of current social work line management structures and address the lack of social work applicants at team leader level within health and social care trusts. NIASW will undertake to do this work in conjunction with the Executive Directors of Social Work.**

The post of Senior Practitioner Social Worker attracts the same level of pay banding as a team leader post but does not involve a team managerial role, possibly making the team leader post less attractive. Feedback from staff attending consultation meetings suggested that in some areas the move towards integrated team structures has resulted in fewer first line managers being from the social work profession. It is clear that the team leader role is not attractive to social workers and in terms of developing future professional leaders there is a need to reverse this trend.

It would be useful to ascertain the exact composition of team leader posts within integrated teams in Northern Ireland to ensure social work is adequately represented. This issue is key to the development of the profession and to promoting and growing the leaders of the future. The Social Work Strategy plans to have a workstream focused on the First Line Manager's role and NIASW will be utilising this group to influence the development of this position and as a possible resource to undertake the proposed audit. The first line manager role is one of the most difficult and challenging roles within social work and clear supports need to be developed for frontline managers as they help shape and mould the workforce.

6   Establish a regional social work forum to provide a mechanism to share good practice and learning.

Establishing a Regional Social Work Forum would enable good practice to be shared across Northern Ireland and give a regional focus to shared learning and the development of evidence-based practice and learning. NIASW understands that under the auspices of the Social Work Strategy the Northern Ireland Social Care Council is leading on developing a Leadership Forum. NIASW will be part of this and will work to ensure that the Forum is not limited to senior managers and incorporates social work leaders from all levels of the profession.

7   Develop and establish a mentor scheme model for social work, initially to be available to newly qualified social workers and line managers.

NIASW has been examining provision of a mentor scheme model for social work in Northern Ireland, based on research carried out internationally and in the United Kingdom and Ireland. The mentor scheme models examined have proven to be effective in improving social work practice. NIASW understands that this proposal is being considered as part of the Social Work Strategy and looks forward to the outcome of the call for evidence regarding mentor and coaching models in social work and to realising what real life differences a mentoring model could make.

8   Increase evidence-based practice which ensures the Post Qualifying Framework (PQ) 'Professional in Practice'(PiP) is accessible and serves to support professional practice.

The Northern Ireland Post Qualifying Framework is robust and recognised as a model of excellence within the United Kingdom. Consultees considered that strengthening the provision of evidence-based practice amongst social workers would serve to strengthen professional identity and recognition of social work as a professional group amongst the wider multi-disciplinary community. Making the PQ Framework more accessible would help to encourage greater use of evidence-based practice. It was also considered that linking PQ qualifications more closely to job role could provide greater professional recognition for social work staff.

Dr Paula McFadden's research identified completion of post qualifying training as a key factor to resilience for child protection social workers (*Resilience and Burnout in Child Protection Social Work*, Dr P McFadden).

NISCC has recently announced that the new model for continuous professional development for social work in Northern Ireland will be called Professional in Practice or PiP. This new approach will continue to contain the current post qualifying academic framework but will seek to recognise a much wider range of learning opportunities including in-service training provision. NIASW supports the aims of PiP and looks forward to being an active member of the on-going PiP Partnership. NIASW have volunteered to be part of the taskforce and finish group to deliver the new model to the profession.

9   **Raise the profile of the profession with media and the public through joint public information campaigns about the role of social work, with a dedicated website, advertising and a launch event. Titled 'What Social Work Does For Us', the initiative should bring together NIASW, DHSSPS, the health and social care boards and NISCC to give a week of focus to the difference social work makes to people's lives.**

9a   **Focus a part of What Social Work Does For Us on social work employers, encouraging social workers to talk publicly about the sort of work they do, to change the current culture in which the need for confidentiality is confused with secrecy and a complete lack of public engagement.**

Social workers attending the consultation meetings felt this was a key area for development in relation to strengthening the social work role in adult services. Over the last 18 months NIASW has increasingly been engaging with the media over social work related news items. The development of the *'Guidance for media reporting on child abuse and neglect'* by QUB, NSPCC, The Detail, NUJ and NIASW, was the beginning of addressing the tensions between the need to educate the public regarding the realities of child protection versus the legal requirement of social services to protect confidential client information. The same issues are present across adult services.

NIASW is aware and involved in work which is ongoing to raise the profile of social work including the provision of the regional social work awards and the celebration of World Social Work Day. However, NIASW agrees with consultees that there is room for a more proactive approach which includes a focus on engagement with the media and capacity building amongst social work staff and managers to enable them to engage meaningfully with the press, whilst protecting individual client information.

10   **For the DHSSPS to write to all Assembly members to urge them to take part in NIASW's Social Work Placement Scheme for politicians, giving first hand insight into a day in the life of a Northern Ireland social worker.**

Participants feel that there is a pressing need for social work as a profession to engage more fully with the lobbying agenda in order to influence and inform political parties and decision makers regarding the value of social work.

NIASW has developed a social work placement scheme, with local health and social care trusts and the voluntary sector, which facilitates and supports politicians to spend time with social workers. This scheme is an effective way of assisting local politicians to gain a greater insight and knowledge of social work. It also provides opportunities to enhance working relationships with political decision makers. NIASW would encourage social workers to promote the scheme with their local representatives.

EXCESSIVE BUREAUCRACY ▷▷▷▷▷▷

The top three issues identified by participants in the survey were recording client file notes, filling in application forms for services and dealing with unplanned crises. Across programmes of care, averages of 70% to 90% of social work respondents, reported that they regularly work additional unpaid hours simply to fulfil the demands of their role. During the consultation meetings it became clear that unplanned crises were arising due to social workers not having available time to work directly with service users to prevent the crisis occurring in the first place.

It is imperative that excessive paperwork and bureaucracy are reduced substantially to allow social workers time to really engage meaningfully with service users and carers. This requires a radical rethink how recording happens, how statistics are captured and how regulators satisfy themselves that standards are being met. It is an issue that requires an urgent response.

This focus on paperwork and recording also has implications for service users and carers. In one case example from the voluntary sector a service user with a learning disability, who has capacity to manage his own finances, gave up this task as he could no longer cope with the demands of the recording required.

At a World Social Work Day event hosted by the voluntary sector, a panel of service users reflected on their experiences of social work services and gave a clear and resounding message that the key to their success was having time to build a relationship with their social worker and engage in therapeutic work with them.

In a separate example one health and social care trust requires four additional forms to be completed, as well as the NISAT form, to access day care provision. This may only be one service the service user is accessing and therefore more additional forms might also be required. This is time wasting and unnecessary given NISAT is a comprehensive assessment form.

Reducing excessive and unnecessary bureaucracy is vital to freeing up social work time and making space for some of the other recommendations in this report.

11   **Review current recording requirements, including expectations on the input of statistics, with a view to introducing practical measures which will reduce unnecessary paperwork and duplication.**

This will require both a local and regional response across programmes of care. It will also require a willingness at senior levels within organisations to truly tackle this endemic problem. Reducing bureaucracy is a key theme within the Social Work Strategy and it will be important to ensure that this issue is prioritised and actioned.

The executive directors of social work are currently reviewing this issue, based in part, on NIASW's report *Social Work Not Paperwork: Reducing unnecessary bureaucracy in child care social work.* NIASW will work hard to ensure that this Blueprint plays a key role in informing their response.

12   **Ensure that social work teams have adequate administration support. At present too many social workers spend large amounts of time carrying out non-social work tasks. NIASW recommends that trusts ensure administration workers input all brokerage data.**

Reducing bureaucracy and recording will automatically reduce the time social workers are spending on administration tasks. In addition, it would also be useful to look at the regional picture of what administration staff are available to support social workers in undertaking social work tasks. The *Social Work Not Paperwork* report (NIASW, 2012) cited one example where changes made to the administration system and increased use of administration staff reduced social work recording time by a total of six hours and 36 minutes per case. It would be useful to examine systems across adult services teams and localities across Northern Ireland to identify further case examples which could then be replicated.

As the new brokerage system goes live online we recommend that inputting the initial data onto the system should be done by administration staff; data input is not a social work task. Duplication of recording demographic information must be addressed. As a case example, within Physical Disability and Older Peoples Services in one health and social care trust, social workers will receive a referral and then be required to input data onto the following systems:

a **Written case record**

b **Brokerage system**

c **SosCare or ElCid**

d **Referral to another agency**

e **NISAT**

◆ Case study

A typical referral to a social worker in an Older People's Team.

A referral is received from a GP for a 78-year-old woman who has a history of angina and limited mobility. She lives alone and is struggling to cope at home.

The table below sets out the recording requirements for a case requiring assessment and service provision.

1. Referral received and entered in client record computer system ie SosCare or ElCid	1. 15 minutes
2. All telephone calls, face-to-face contact and meetings are manually recorded into a case record	2. 1 hour
3. Assessment with service user and NISAT contact screening documentation (time with service user 1.5 hours)	3. 2 hours
4. Further home visits with service user	4. 2 hours
5. Completion of NISAT Core Assessment	5. 6 hours
6. Referral to other services – e.g. Day Care (NB: In some Trust areas referral to day care requires four separate forms. Each service provider requires different forms)	6. 2 hours
7. Domiciliary care form completed manually and entered into a computer system	7. 30 minutes
8. Care Plan	8. 1 hour
9. Carers Assessment (includes client contact of 1.5 hours)	9. 3 hours
This time plan does not include reviewing services, dealing with changes to the care plan or unplanned crises.	Total time: 17 hours 45 minutes Time with service user: 4 hours 30 minutes Time spent on documentation and bureaucracy: 13 hours 15 minutes

13 **Explore increased use of IT systems and technology solutions as one way to enable social workers to spend significantly more time engaged in therapeutic face-to-face interventions with people who use services, ensuring capacity building and training are provided to those who need it.**

IT systems and information technology may provide some time saving solutions to the issue of paperwork and recording. It would be useful to examine ways in which this could be incorporated into recording requirements and specifically how to reduce duplication of recording between manual and IT systems.

14 **Review the Northern Ireland Single Assessment Tool (NISAT) system and implementation.**

While there was support for the concept of the Northern Ireland Single Assessment Tool (NISAT), staff attending the consultation meetings consistently raised challenges regarding the current system and its implementation.

"NISAT core assessments usually fall to the role of the social worker; to complete a core assessment with a client takes approximately 1$^{1/2}$ hours. To put a service in place the client's name, DoB and address have to be entered approximately four times and 36 pages of information has to be completed."

The commonly held view was that NISAT is not working in its current form and elements of its implementation need to be reviewed. This includes:

- Staff, service user and carer feedback on their experiences in using the NISAT framework.
- Developing a profile of which professionals are completing which sections of the tool.
- Capturing the time required to complete each section of NISAT.
- The ability to produce a holistic social work assessment using the current NISAT tool.
- The level of duplication in the current system, in terms of recording manually and electronically.
- How well current computer systems support the process.
- Social workers are expected to complete sections of NISAT for which they do not have the appropriate knowledge and skill. They should not be completing Nursing, Occupational Therapy, Physiotherapy and other fields of NISAT.

NIASW is aware that ongoing regional work is being completed with regard to NISAT and the introduction of E-NISAT. NIASW hopes these developments will assist in alleviating some of the difficulties described by social workers during the survey and consultation meetings. However, the degree of concern and volume of feedback made it necessary to include this recommendation.

NIASW is aware that the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority (RQIA) is committed to reviewing NISAT. This work is due to commence in May 2014 and NIASW therefore offers these suggestions to inform that review. NIASW will be meeting with the RQIA review team to share the social work profession's views on NISAT.

LACK OF RESOURCES & RESOURCE LED SERVICES ▶▶▶▶▶▶

The systematic reduction in budgets across adult services in recent years has led to a situation where services available to meet service user and carer needs are significantly reduced and the systems and administration to access services has become more cumbersome and time consuming.

NIASW makes a number of further recommendations.

15   **Pilot and evaluate the Family Group Conferencing Model in adult services.**

NIASW understands that a scheme has now been approved by the Innovation Fund and is being piloted in the SEHSCT. NIASW looks forward to reading the results of the pilot.

16   **Focus on prevention to decrease the need for service provision, ensuring social workers have time to meaningfully interact with clients and carers, which includes reducing paperwork and bureaucracy requirements.**

Implementing the recommendations to reduce excessive bureaucracy should help to free up staff time to engage in preventative work and reduce the number of unplanned crises which occur.

17   **Explore a wider and more established community development model which facilitates clients being cared for and integrated into their own communities in a more meaningful way and also reduces the need for statutory service provision. Support people to make decisions about living with risk, include positive risk taking and capacity assessments.**

The increasing risk adverse nature which is developing in social work is preventing positive risk taking and innovative practice. This was particularly raised as an issue during the voluntary sector consultation. Social work should be a radical profession and one of its key roles and individual skills is to act as an agent for change; both at an individual and societal level.

Some of the recommendations contained in this report include the need for involvement and feedback from those in society who are actively using social work services. Their voice should be central to any proposed changes to service provision. NIASW will ensure that this report is shared with key service user stakeholders, such as the Social Work Strategy Citizen's Forum.

18   **To reduce the pressure on statutory services by developing a regional scoping exercise of voluntary and community services which would help to identify what is currently available in each part of Northern Ireland and where there may be capacity to support overstretched areas.**

This recommendation could form part of the remit of the Social Work Strategy Voluntary Forum and NIASW would be pleased to assist with this proposal.

WORKLOAD ▶▶▶▶▶

19 **Develop a standardised regional caseload weighting system across all programmes of care and settings in adult services. This should be audited regularly.**

NIASW understands that this has been funded through the Social Work Strategy Innovation Fund and is being piloted within the Northern Health and Social Care Trust area.

20 **Develop one single referral form for use by all services; the core NISAT form could be used. NIASW would suggest a pilot in one trust area to measure the time savings and improvements secured for service users.**

Seventy-five per cent of all staff surveyed reported that completing application forms to access individual services was a major issue preventing them from spending face-to-face time in direct work with clients and carers. Having one standardised form would eliminate duplication in recording and free up social work time to engage in meaningful activity with service users.

21 **Share regional learning to enable systems which are working to be adopted by other teams and agencies where caseloads are unacceptably high.**

This could be in part facilitated by recommendation 11 and the development of a Northern Ireland Social Work Forum. Reducing bureaucracy is highlighted as an aim within the Social Work Strategy and the sharing of good practice examples, where recording requirements have been reduced without compromising safe care, could also be facilitated through the work of the various groups involved in implementation of the Strategy.

22 **Reduce the need for paperwork and free up social work time to respond to client need.**

Some examples of this include eliminating additional forms to access separate services; the eradication of duplication in recording; review of NISAT usage, and ensuring administration tasks are completed by administrative staff – instead of social workers.

This recommendation flows from the recommendations under Excessive Bureaucracy, which, if implemented, will achieve the aim of freeing up social work time for client need.

23 **Review the capacity for current electronic systems to accurately capture social work activity in cases.**

A significant gap has been highlighted in terms of a failing of current electronic systems to accurately capture the volume of social work caseloads within adult services. There are a variety of computer systems used by all professionals to capture referrals and activity levels. They do not currently capture the majority of the social work workload.

ELCID, SosCare and CSRMS all record and monitor the activity levels of work for district nurses, physiotherapists and all other allied health professionals. However, they do not capture the ongoing cases open to social workers which require fluctuating levels of intervention. This, therefore, gives a false reading of the skill mix required across teams and to meet service needs. At present within certain health and

social care trusts, only referrals that come through a central telephone line are recorded as referrals and therefore logged as activity against that professional group. Social workers, who are named workers/key workers for a large number of service users, can be contacted directly by that person or their carer. This work is not captured or counted as activity because it did not get registered on the central referral line. It is usual that people make contact in a crisis and this can entail huge amounts of time and effort for the social workers.

Under the current system this is not captured and reflected as a core part of the team's activity. When figures are being used to argue for more staff they are based on an inaccurate and flawed system which does not adequately reflect the needs of that local population. Social workers do not wish to make accessing their services more difficult and so do not force people who are experiencing a crisis to phone a different telephone number to be re-referred back to themselves to receive help.

NIASW asserts that this is a fundamental failing; it is unacceptable that current electronic monitoring systems do not capture social work activity. No other professional group would accept this situation. The message this sends to social workers is that their work is not valued, it is not significant and it is not important. This must change urgently.

As a profession regulated by the Northern Ireland Social Care Council (NISCC), social workers have a personal responsibility to be accountable for the quality of their own work and that delegated to others (NISCC Codes of Practice of Social Care Workers 6, 6.1 and 6.6.) Many respondents report concern that at current caseload levels they are struggling to meet their obligations under these codes.

NIASW has fed back to NISCC that some staff are working at unsafe levels across all programmes of care. This issue has also been raised by NIPSA and UNISON at the NISCC Registrants Committee. NIASW has expressed concern that the current system has an unequal bias towards the individual social worker and this leaves people feeling at risk. The remit of the current code does not cover such breeches by employers and NISCC would assert that this is the role of the RQIA. However, most social workers do not know how to access the RQIA to report concerns about employment practices which impact negatively on professional practice. Also, as a professional body we remain unclear about the exact lines of accountability between the DHSSPS, the HSCB and the RQIA in this matter. It is vital that there is a transparent process for holding employers to account and that the profession knows how and when to use it.

NIASW has therefore suggested in the recent Review of the Codes of Practice that the Code of Practice for Employers of Social Care Workers needs to be revised to reflect the fact that employers cannot be held to account by NISCC for breaches to current Code of Practice and that it should be called 'guidance'.

We further recommend that:

24 **NIASW recommends that significant change is required to the current system of holding employers to account and to clarifying who will act when employers breach the Code of Practice for Employers of Social Care Workers by continuously requiring social workers to work at unsafe levels.**

CONCLUSION ▶▶▶▶▶

The aim of this report has been to detail and respond to the findings of NIASW's Adult Services Survey and consultations. It shows areas where good practice in social work is present and highlights the most pressing challenges facing social workers in adult services settings.

There are some obvious similarities with the findings of an earlier survey undertaken with childcare social workers, *Social Work Not Paper Work: Reducing unnecessary bureaucracy in childcare social work* (2012). It is evident that social workers care deeply about their work and the people who use their services. They want to be able to spend more time in face-to-face work with people and to reduce the unnecessary levels of bureaucracy, paperwork and duplication. There is a growing sense of frustration that the role social workers now perform is as form filler, gatekeeper and bureaucrat, which is not what they trained to be and is not what service users want or need.

This report has evidenced the frustrations and offered real term solutions to those challenges. There is a real opportunity with the development of the Social Work Strategy to take on board these recommendations and reclaim the Social Work role.

The recommendations from this report will be shared with key stakeholders such as the executive directors of social work in health and social care trusts, the Health and Social Care Board, the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority, the Northern Ireland Social Care Council and the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety.

It will also be shared with practitioners and NIASW will lead on the development of a definition of social work that really reflects the diverse, complex, demanding and rewarding job that is social work within adult services.

NIASW would like to thank the social workers and managers who took time to complete the survey and to attend the consultation meetings.

Your voice has been heard and NIASW is committed to ensuring positive change for the social work profession

NIASW

N.IRELAND ASSOCIATION OF SOCIAL WORKERS

(PART OF BASW)

Northern Ireland Association of Social Workers
Douglas House
397 Ormeau Road
Belfast
BT7 3GP

Tel; 028 90648873
Email: n.ireland@basw.co.uk

www.basw.co.uk