

SOCIAL WORK PRACTICES (SWPS) - FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Background and Purpose of the Policy

1. What is the purpose of the policy ?

To improve the experiences and outcomes for people in vulnerable circumstances and empower social workers to do their jobs effectively, while reducing bureaucracy.

2. What are SWPs and how will they work?

SWPs are social worker led organisations that are independent of the local authority and provide social work services for specified groups of adults. They will discharge the statutory duties and responsibilities of the local authority in relation to these people.

SWPs are a new way of providing social work services for adults. What each SWP will look like and how it will work will vary depending on local needs and priorities.

Further detail information about the SWP pilots run by the Department for Education for Looked After Children can be found at <http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/everychildmatters/safeguardingandsocialcare/childrenincare/socialworkpracticepilots/swppilots/>

3. What will SWPs do?

SWPs will discharge functions of the local authority and be responsible for providing the support to people in the SWP to achieve better experiences and better outcomes. They will have responsibility for undertaking delegated social work functions, managing day-to-day support, co-ordinating and monitoring service provision. The local authority will keep its strategic and corporate responsibilities and will manage the contract and partnership with the SWP.

4. Why does the Government want these SWP pilots?

This Government is fully committed to improving the experiences and outcomes for people in vulnerable circumstances and empowering social workers to do their jobs effectively, while reducing bureaucracy.

The SWP programme supports the Government's wider agenda of building the 'Big Society'. We want to bring the people who access services and staff closer. That is why we want to give local authorities this unique opportunity to test the potential benefits of the SWP model and adopt a completely innovative approach to delivering services for adults and their carers. We will be offering financial support for the pilots to help them set up and develop the SWPs. We want to free staff to use discretion and bring decision-making closer to service users .

5. What is the purpose of the pilots ?

To give local authorities opportunities to test the potential benefits of SWP models and adopt a completely innovative approach to delivering services for adults and their carers.

6. What will success look like?

- Better quality of services
- Greater work satisfaction for staff
- Greater satisfaction of people using services and their carers through better outcomes
- Greater community involvement on the part of service users, both individually and through partnership with user-led organisations
- Greater community cohesion through:
 - more joined up services as the SWP acts as a catalyst to encourage wider partnerships within a locality
 - more opportunities for volunteering in the work of the SWP
- Less bureaucracy and greater efficiency in systems and procedures, both within the SWP and the council (and perhaps in other partner organisations)
- Integration of services e.g between SWPs and GP practices/consortia

7. What is DH providing funding for?

The funding DH is providing is for start up costs of the pilots in 2010/11 and there is the possibility of a modest amount of further support in 2011/12.

8. How will the applications be assessed?

We will need to devise criteria for assessing the model outlines submitted, with an appropriate scoring system. We will be developing these in co-production with our partners.

9. How will the pilots be evaluated?

We will need to agree common outcomes of the SWPs that we want information about and commission an evaluation. Involvement with the evaluation will be a key requirement of the pilot site.

10. How do local authorities submit an expression of interest for piloting a SWP?

In the first instance interested local authorities will need to complete the Expression of Interest (EOI) questionnaire which can be found at

http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Lettersandcirculars/Dearcolleagueletters/DH_121623

and return it to the Department of Health (DH) mailbox at: SWPenquiries.dh.gsi.gov.uk no later than **Friday 24 December 2010**.

At this stage we are not asking for detailed proposals. Councils should submit outline proposals for the SWP they would like to develop on the Expression Of Interest questionnaire.

11. How will local authorities be selected to pilot a SWP?

Successful local authorities following the Expression Of Interest phase will be asked to submit more detailed proposals for grant, guided by questions which will be provided when the successful local authorities from the EOI exercise are contacted. The detailed proposals will be evaluated and we envisage that around ten local authorities will be selected to run the SWP pilots. Several representatives from the social care world will work with the Department throughout this process.

12. When do you expect the SWP pilots to go live?

We expect the SWP pilots to be live by summer 2011, subject to Parliamentary approval of secondary legislation.

13. Who will be allocated to SWPs?

SWPs will aim to provide services which are better tailored to the needs of adults and their carers. Each local authority will need to agree with the contracting SWP which groups of people will be allocated to the SWP.

14. How many people will be in a SWP?

One of the key elements of the SWP model is its size. It is intended to be small enough that social workers in the practice feel a sense of ownership of their organisation and their work, so that decisions can be made more responsively, enabling them to have closer relationships with the people who use services.

But the SWP also needs to be large enough to support a staff group with a sufficient range of skills; to cover holidays, sickness, other absences and out of hours work; to have proper governance, quality and risk assurance and to have a budget of a sufficient size to be flexible enough to meet people's changing needs.

The SWP will need to get the balance between the wish to be small and the need to be sufficiently large. This is not prescriptive and each pilot local authority will determine the size of a SWP to best meet a particular group of people's needs.

15. Who will work for the SWP and who will be accountable?

SWPs will be social worker-led but may employ a range of staff to meet the needs of people, for example peer supporters, occupational therapists, and other specialist professionals including emerging GP consortia.

The local authority must put in place a SWP that has one named person who is responsible for the delivery of the SWP contract (i.e. similar to the appointment within the local authority of a Director of Adult Services) and the SWP should inform the local authority when and if this person changes. The aim is to ensure there are clear governance arrangements within the SWP so that responsibility for people's welfare does not fall between gaps between members of the practice.

In addition the SWP is likely to employ, or contract for, business and administrative staff e.g. a practice manager, receptionists and accountants, and potentially research support. (see question 22 also)

There may also be social work students attached to the practice to emphasise training and engage with the local authority and/or local universities in social work education and research. One member of staff will be the named Officer for Professional Development in order to comply with the current General Social Care Council's (GSCC) Code of Practice.

16. What kind of organisation are SWPs?

SWPs can be many different types of organisation but all must be social worker led. They might be a social enterprise, a voluntary organisation or a private organisation. They will comply with the current GSCC's Code of Practice for Employers.

The SWP may be a "professional practice" where the SWP is owned by social workers. This organisation could be based on social enterprise, a formal partnership, a co-operative, a voluntary or private organisation. The key element is that some or all of the social workers working for the SWP have full or part ownership of the SWP.

A "Professional practice" means an organisation which is:

1. a separate legal entity independent of the Local Authority.
2. majority owned by Engaged Registered Social Workers, and
3. majority controlled by Engaged Registered Social Workers

"Engaged registered social workers" means registered social workers who are personally engaged in providing the social work services which are provided by the social work practice.

Logistics

17. How will the SWP pilots be put in place?

The local authority will support the set up of the SWP and the transition of people to the SWP. Once in place, the SWP will use its income under the contract with the local authority to provide services and improve the experience and outcomes for people in the SWP. The local authority will manage the contract, monitor performance and manage the relationship.

The local authority will review the contract with the SWP periodically to set new outcome targets and adjust payments. The DH would expect these reviews to occur annually.

Although the local authority will remain liable for the performance of functions undertaken by the SWP, the authority will be able to sue for any breach of contract. It will work closely with the local authority, and each local authority should decide what decisions it wishes the SWP to refer to it for agreement.

18. How is the relationship with the Local authority and how will the outcomes of the SWP be managed?

The local authority needs to maintain a close relationship with the SWP as it retains ultimate responsibility for the services delivered and actions taken by the SWP. But it also needs to allow the SWP scope to innovate and make decisions about the best packages of support and services for the people in the SWP and how to provide these. The Department would expect the local authority to monitor the outcomes of the SWP, identifying issues early and providing support, whilst allowing the SWP sufficient autonomy to decide how best to meet the needs of the people with whom it works.

19. In reality, how will SWPs improve the lives of people?

Evidence suggests that there is considerable potential to improve the lives of people by providing more person-centred services. There is also evidence that employee owned organisations have lower staff turnover and capacity for greater innovation. Piloting SWPs allows further examination of these two evidence bases.

20. How will councils decide who to transfer to SWPs?

The transfer process will be managed between each local authority and SWP. Where transfers take place, it is for the local authority and SWP to agree, as part of their contract, clear and transparent criteria for deciding who to transfer. It would be for local authorities to decide where social workers could be most effectively deployed.

21. Will SWPs cover just conventional office hours?

Ideally SWPs will provide “out-of-hours” support directly to ensure continuity of services. However, if the SWP is small, and particularly while it is getting started, the SWP could choose to purchase “out-of-hours” support from the local authority.

22. What about access to other local authority services and expertise?

This will be agreed between the local authority and SWP, as part of their contract. The SWP’s budget will reflect a proportionate transfer of funding including corporate costs. Therefore the SWP will be expected to make its own arrangements for support services (although it may “buy back” some of these e.g. HR), for placements and for other support. The SWP will also be able to make arrangements to access those specialist services that the local authority may provide that haven’t been included in the funding transfer (for example, sensory impairment or HIV/AIDS). This type of arrangement will be set out in the contract.

23. What services will SWPs arrange or purchase for the people they are working with?

SWPs will need to access local universal services (leisure and transport for example), local targeted services (for example, sheltered housing or CAMHS) and arrange, purchase or commission specialist placements and services. The SWPs will work closely with the local authority and other local providers and may participate in joint commissioning processes.

24. Will there be a role for the private sector?

Yes. SWPs are about achieving a better experience and better outcomes for people regardless of sector or type of provision.

25. How will service users be involved?

We expect local authorities and SWPs to engage and involve service users and their carers at an early stage. We would expect SWPs to involve service users and their carers in the governance of the SWPs. The performance of an SWP will include measures of people's views. SWPs should also ensure that people's voices are heard in their reviews and in any ongoing relationship with their social workers.

Accountability

26. How will accountability work in the world of SWPs?

The local authority's priorities for adults will inform the service description within the SWP contract. The local authority will be accountable for the successful operation of the SWP, just as it is in relation to other local services. In this respect, the contract between the local authority and the SWP is critical. Once the contract has been agreed, there will need to be rigorous contract management to ensure local authority and SWP accountability.

27. How will SWPs reduce the bureaucracy for social workers?

In an employee-owned business front-line social workers run the organisation. They have more autonomy and control over their working lives. The time spent checking decisions up the hierarchy should therefore decrease. As well as giving social workers greater responsibility and empowering them in their decision making, allowing them more control over their work should lead to greater innovation.

SWPs cannot completely eliminate "bureaucracy", some of which is a fundamental part of being accountable. The SWP still has to contribute data to the local authority so that the local authority can report on its performance both locally and to DH and CQC. It will still have to maintain thorough records and contribute, where necessary, to court proceedings.

28. Will social workers in SWPs be registered by the GSCC?

Yes, and local authorities should not enter into arrangements unless they are satisfied that care functions will be carried out by or under the supervision of registered social workers.

29. Will social workers in SWPs get bonuses?

Each SWP will develop an operating model and performance management framework within which bonuses could be a part of the social worker role. It will be up to each SWP to decide their payment structure. However, the reality is that bonus payments will not form a significant proportion of total remuneration.

30. What would the career path be for someone entering a SWP?

The Social Work Task Force recommended the introduction of a single, nationally recognised, career structure for social work which makes clear the expectations that should apply to social workers at each stage in their career. The Social Work Reform Board is currently taking this work forward. This will be just as relevant for social workers in SWPs as for those in local authorities and existing private and voluntary sector organisations.

31. What arrangements would need to be made for supervision for senior members of a SWP?

Effective supervision is critical to good social work practice and it is important that SWP staff have access to this. SWPs will need to comply with the professional regulator's expectations on supervision (currently the GSCC Code of Practice for Employers) and ensure that all practitioners have effective supervision arrangements in place. In addition, the Social Work Task Force recommended a clear national standard for the support social workers should expect from their employers to do their jobs effectively - and this will include supervision arrangements. This standard is currently being developed by the Social Work Reform Board and will be rolled out in spring 2011.

32. What will be in place to ensure that SWPs keep people's records appropriately?

SWPs must make sure that all data is captured and reported in line with local authority requirements. This will be written into the contract. Essentially, SWPs must adhere to all legislation regarding adults, as well as the Data Protection Act, Freedom of Information Act, and equalities legislation.

It would be expected that local authorities will support SWPs to get record-keeping processes in place and software licences can be given to the SWP.

33. Can the SWPs sub-contract services to other partners?

There are a variety of opportunities for SWPs to sub-contract. The SWP can commission placements and services for the people in their care. They can commission agency social workers but these should only be used on an exceptional basis as the principle of continuity of social work is core to the model. In relation to professional supervision, we envisage that most of this will be organised within the practice, although arrangements are likely to need to be made to purchase this where the practice has a managing or consultant social worker. A SWP may also decide to purchase or arrange its support functions (such as HR or IT support) from elsewhere.

34. How will people using services move to the SWP?

Each SWP will plan a transition of an agreed number of people from the local authority. It is for the local authority and SWP to agree, as part of their contract, clear

and transparent criteria for deciding who to transfer. It is also for the local authority and the SWP to agree the exact process for the transfer.

We would expect people to be transferred to the SWP in a way that provides as much continuity of care as possible. Good practice would require a period of joint responsibility to support the process and respect any existing relationship.

35. How will the pilots be evaluated?

We will tender for evaluators in the new year. The evaluation will examine the process of setting up SWPs, the benefits to social workers and other staff in the pilots, and the outcomes and experiences of adults within the pilots, comparing these with outcomes for people who are not in the pilots. It will also examine the impact that SWPs have on the local authorities. The evaluation will begin in Summer/Autumn 2011 and the findings of the evaluation will be published.

36. How will you deal with failing SWPs?

The local authority is responsible for commissioning the SWP and it will need to ensure that the SWP delivers on the contract. There are a variety of ways the local authority can implement a robust contract management process, including regular meetings, which will ensure that issues and problems are identified quickly and that appropriate action is taken. If however, a SWP is consistently failing to fulfil the terms of its contract, or there is concern about the welfare of people being cared for in the SWP then the local authority may have no choice but to terminate the contract and bring the functions back in house.