



Capability Statement for Principal Social Workers in Adult Services

Published July 2019

Contents

Contents	1
Capability Statement for Principal Social Workers in adult services	2
1. The role and attributes of a Principal Social Worker	3
2. Values and ethics	5
3. Advise the Director of Adult Social Services (DASS) and the wider council, advocating for systems and structures that support the social work workforce and meet the needs of people who need care and support	5
4. Identify and develop arrangements for excellent social work practice across a range of settings	6
5. Support effective social work supervision, culture and expectations	8
6. Oversee quality assurance and improvement in social work practice.....	8

Capability Statement for Principal Social Workers in adult services

This Capability Statement sets out what a Principal Social Worker (PSW) in adult services should know and be able to do, to ensure that effective professional social work practice is developed and supported within their organisation.

It reflects the unique nature of a role located at a strategic level, outside of the operational system but in direct contact with frontline social work practice.

It acknowledges the reality that PSWs are employed at differing levels within organisations and have varying profiles dependent on where they are based. Many have other responsibilities alongside that of PSW, including operational management, safeguarding, quality assurance, learning and development; and in some cases, they fulfil the role in both adult and child and family services.

A key function of this statement is therefore, to support a move towards more consistency in scope, autonomy, influence and impact of the PSW role across the whole sector.

This Statement has been developed through an iterative process involving Principal Social Workers, the Chief Social Worker and her team and supported by Skills for Care who have prepared the initial and final drafts.

The statement is based on:

- The [Care Act statutory guidance](#) (refreshed March 2016), which lists both the functions of the PSW and the responsibility of the local authority to ensure arrangements are in place to have a qualified and registered social work professional practice lead, with a remit to develop excellent social work practice.

The Care Act guidance recognises that that this core task does not operate in isolation from the adult social care system and highlights the requirement for the PSW to work within this system and have influence on the delivery of services and other social care roles connected with social work.

To achieve this, the guidance states that PSWs should be party to decision-making with managers and directors in the top tiers of the organisation and be a member of a relevant high-level leadership team; any other additional responsibilities should be limited. At a strategic level, it is expected that resources and support necessary to fulfil their role will be commensurate with the level of responsibility and accountability.

- The [Professional Capabilities Framework \(PCF\)](#) - the development of this statement has been influenced by much of the detail within the nine domains at strategic level.
- The [Knowledge and Skills Statement](#) for social workers in adult services - this was published by the Department of Health and Social Care in 2015 and provides the detail of the role of social workers in adult services and the core knowledge and skills required. This statement should apply to all social workers at whatever level in the organisation and in any employment setting and should be used to underpin the task of the PSW in understanding and developing excellent social work practice within their organisation.
- The [Post-qualifying Standards for Social Work Practice Supervisors](#) in adult social care, published by the Department of Health and Social Care in December 2018, should also be used in a similar way. In time, it is anticipated that PSWs' practice will have been evaluated against the supervisor post-qualifying standards as part of their career development.

It is recognised that the PSW is unlikely to have ultimate responsibility for all the aspects of the role contained here. Their task is to use their professional authority and leadership skills to influence and enable other key players in the organisation and partner agencies to achieve the outcomes.

As the professional lead with a unique remit within the organisation, there is a danger of isolation. Support from the Director of Adult Social Services (DASS) and access to professional supervision is, therefore, vital to the successful execution of the PSW role. This statement can be used to support this requirement for professional supervision.

In addition, employers can use it to influence PSW job role and design; to support continuing professional development (CPD) for PSWs and to assist in designing career progression routes into the role.

1. The role and attributes of a Principal Social Worker

1.1 The PSW role includes specific statutory elements in the Care Act, primarily the promotion of wellbeing for people in need of care and support. Leading by example, the PSW will:

- Model through their professional practice, behaviours that demonstrate integrity, consistency and the ability to use legitimate challenge.
- Demonstrate how these attributes are underpinned by social work ethics and values.

Capability Statement for Principal Social Workers in adult services

- Demonstrate sound and current knowledge of the law, policy, theory, research and professional practice.

1.2 Using their position and professional authority and supported by the DASS they will:

- Be a highly visible and valued figure, accessible to front line social work staff.
- Occupy a position of significant influence within the local social care and health system
- Maximise their personal and professional authority through networking and challenge.
- Be known within the organisation and locally for their application of core theoretical and applied knowledge, skills, legislation and case law. They will in turn contribute to the development of this body of knowledge.

1.3 Using their professional influence PSWs will:

- Ensure that organisational systems, structures, policies and procedures contribute to better outcomes.
- Take a relationship-based approach to leadership and advocacy, using feedback from people who use social work services and co-producing good practice with adults, carers and social workers.
- Represent practice and advocate for best practice without being compromised by resource-led considerations. (This is a difficult balance as PSWs should take resources into account, as part of their accountability to all people who may need care and support, but they should not be constrained in their professional judgement by the need to reduce costs.)
- Support and model co-production and person-centred practice which is appropriately balanced with safeguarding responsibilities.
- Develop a shared vision, across the organisation and with partners, of what excellent social work looks like; help create a culture that seeks to continually improve the quality of practice outcomes and shape change to achieve this.
- Identify, quantify and advocate for social work and other relevant resources.
- Create opportunities for social workers to continue learning and developing their practice capability throughout their career in an environment that is supportive and encourages best practice.

2. Values and ethics

2.1 The PSW will model and ensure that social work practice and services are underpinned by and demonstrate values and ethical principles advocating for *principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility and respect for diversities*, which are central to the national and international [definition](#) of social work.

2.2 The PSW will:

- Advocate and champion social work values and ethics within the organisation, commissioned services and other partners, such that the unique contribution that social work makes in this respect is recognised, acknowledged and valued.
- Have responsibility for influencing the development and maintenance of an organisational culture where principles of social justice, social inclusion and equality are applied to strategic decision making
- Lead on the development of strategic approaches that seek to embed social work values and practice standards at all levels.
- Provide practice leadership in situations where complex ethical decisions are required and ensure the critical application of professional ethics underpinned by human rights and the legislative framework.

3. Advise the Director of Adult Social Services (DASS) and the wider council, advocating for systems and structures that support the social work workforce and meet the needs of people who need care and support

3.1 The PSW's role will be recognised by the DASS, the organisation and partners as key to identifying and highlighting the benefits and risks of how organisational structures impact on social work practice. This includes integrated and commissioned social work services and peers in child and family services.

3.2 Through active involvement with the DASS, and the wider council, PSWs will provide a conduit between frontline practice and strategic decision-making, creating a bridge between policy and practice, highlighting and advising the organisation on these and other issues which may impact on it, e.g. implications of demographic changes in the local population on services and for the workforce.

3.3 As the professional lead in the organisation, their ability to confidently analyse, respond, guide and act as a 'critical friend' to support complex cases and in decision-making, will be recognised by the DASS, the organisation and partners.

3.4 With support from the DASS the PSW will:

- Ensure that people who need care and support are involved in all governance arrangements and that their voice is heard.
- Conduct and make best use of the results of the Local Government Association (LGA) annual Social Work Health Check, to inform strategic planning, including monitoring the success of new and developing initiatives.
- Advocate for and maintain social work professional identity across all social work services, ensuring that appropriate social work models are applied.
- Advocate for sufficient social work resources in order that personalised, integrated care and support is available and that appropriate safeguarding procedures can be implemented when required.
- Establish a role with other professions and agencies to advocate for the social work offer and to ensure social workers in these organisations can achieve best outcomes.
- Provide the link between national bodies and the organisation on best practice, case law and the developing social work improvement agenda.
- Use their understanding of practice and the political context at national and local level, to influence and provide strategic leadership and advice to the DASS.

4. Identify and develop arrangements for excellent social work practice across a range of settings

4.1 The PSW role has responsibility for social work practice in a range of settings across social care and health.

4.2 The PSW will:

- Emphasise the importance of gathering and acting on feedback from people who need care and support.
- Influence service redesign, policy and procedures to create a culture in which excellent practice is expected and celebrated.

Capability Statement for Principal Social Workers in adult services

- Be instrumental in driving a shared strategic vision which inspires, motivates and encapsulates the organisational commitment to the principle of individual wellbeing (Care Act 2014).
- Actively influence a learning organisational culture with sufficient support and resources to ensure the resilience of practitioners and promote their well-being, so that they can provide excellent social work.
- Develop a clear understanding of what critical reflection and analysis in practice entails for every social worker.
- Support the strategic development of strengths-based practice knowledge and restorative approaches.
- Ensure all social workers have a robust applied knowledge of the legal and policy frameworks that mandate social work.
- Ensure that social workers feel confident to take positive risks, based on defensible and legally literate professional decisions, within a supportive environment that encourages the development of professional autonomy.

4.3 As professional lead in the organisation they will:

- Critically appraise theory and the best evidence and rationale for different practice approaches.
- Implement a practice framework.
- Influence workforce planning and development strategies.
- Ensure effective professional development is available for social workers at all stages of their career.
- Embed the Knowledge and Skills Statements/post-qualifying standards and advocate for a career pathway that shapes current and future practice quality.
- Ensure that Newly Qualified Social Workers have access to the Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE) and oversee the quality of support and assessment in line with national requirements.
- Actively promote and support the development of the practice leadership function of social workers.
- Identify and develop people with emerging leadership talent and support innovative recruitment and retention opportunities.

- Ensure that the learning and development needs of staff are regularly monitored and meet the requirements of the HCPC/Social Work England.

5. Support effective social work supervision, culture and expectations

5.1 PSWs should lead by example in modelling excellent supervision practice and promote an organisational culture in which regular professional supervision is prioritised and valued.

5.2 The PSW will:

- Put a supervision policy in place that ensures all social workers have access to regular professional supervision, provided by another registered social worker (as outlined in the Standards for Employers) and which is reviewed regularly.
- Work with managers at all levels to regularly review the effectiveness of the supervision policy.
- Take steps to ensure that any gaps or workforce development needs identified through the auditing process are addressed.
- Ensure that a range of evidence informed resources, tools and models are available which support the development of critical reflection and analysis.
- Ensure that supervision supports the development of practice and a practice framework, making use of theoretical perspectives, models, legislation, research-based knowledge and evidenced informed practice.

5.3 The PSW should actively demonstrate trust in the workforce and develop a culture which promotes learning, critical reflection and analysis and the acceptance of accountability.

6. Oversee quality assurance and improvement in social work practice

6.1 The PSW should have oversight of quality assurance frameworks and ensure measures are in place to audit the quality of social work practice and structures for service delivery.

6.2 They will be able to:

Capability Statement for Principal Social Workers in adult services

- Set high quality practice standards and create a clear sense of accountability for the impact of social work on the lives of people and communities.
- Instil a sense of pride in social work practice, recognising and commending excellent practice.
- Secure an in-depth, comprehensive and up to date understanding of the realities of practice across the organisation and know how to address the early signs of emerging problems.
- Provide support to line managers, endorsing and upholding their positive resolutions in holding poor practice to account.
- Influence the design and process for obtaining feedback from people who need care and support, working in co-production with them to ensure meaningful outcomes for individuals and their families.
- Ensure recommendations from formal proceedings inform local policy and practice (e.g. Safeguarding Adult Reviews) and communicate outcomes at all levels.

© Crown copyright 2019

Published to GOV.UK in pdf format only.

[Care and Transformation Directorate/Office of the Chief Social Worker for Adults]

www.gov.uk/dhsc

This publication is licensed under the terms of the Open Government Licence v3.0 except where otherwise stated. To view this licence, visit nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/version/3

Where we have identified any third party copyright information you will need to obtain permission from the copyright holders concerned.

