Ministerial Foreword

Achieving good outcomes for people and communities depends on having a confident, competent and valued social services workforce with effective frontline practitioners delivering safe and personalised support and services. To do this, employers and practitioners need to work together to develop a supportive and creative environment where people have a shared vision, clarity on accountabilities and responsibilities, good leadership and supervision, manage risk and work effectively with each other, other agencies and the people who need support and help.

This Practice Governance Framework, in conjunction with the guidance on The Role of the Chief Social Worker and The Role of the Registered Social Worker in Statutory Interventions, provides a suite of materials to help employers and practitioners achieve this.

The Framework recognises that there are complex interdependencies and relationships in delivering safe, effective, accountable and professional practice within the variously configured governance and organisational structures that exist. One size does not fit all, however, the Framework provides a prompt which employers and practitioners can use locally to assess whether there is clarity of roles, responsibilities and accountabilities; that the conditions, organisational environment, leadership and professional support are in place to promote wellbeing; and to take responsibility for their own practice and learning and development.

In talking about ‘safe’ practice, let’s be clear this is not about being cautious or unenterprising, which might be the default position of some especially in a challenging financial climate. This is about balancing risks, rights and responsibilities in a way that supports well-informed decision making, using professional judgement and discretion, empowering creativity and opportunities to do things differently and more efficiently and effectively, within a framework of accountability.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank Andrew Lowe for his commitment, tenacity and leadership in taking this work forward. Also, the members of the Practice Governance Group who, I know, have been challenging, constructive and highly motivated in developing and delivering these materials. From the ongoing engagement and drive, it is clear the importance the group attaches to providing clear, practical and accessible support for those responsible; at all levels, for developing and delivering support and services. I commend their work to you all.

Adam Ingram
Minister for Children and Early Years
I am delighted to publish this Practice Governance Framework, a tool to aid practitioners and employers further develop and sustain a confident, competent and valued workforce which delivers safe, effective and personalised support and services.

This completes the final task for the Practice Governance Group, one of five Change programmes set up following Changing Lives to develop some national resources and tools to promote and support change in social services to improve outcomes for the people and communities we support. Our first publication, in May 2008, was the Principles and Standards for Citizen Leadership. This work, developed by the User and Carer Forum, led to a booklet, a DVD and training events and has contributed effectively to shifting the balance of leadership. In my own area, Scottish Borders, the citizen leadership group has effectively campaigned to get a large local bank to make its entrance accessible.

In developing this Framework and the guidance on The Role of the Chief Social Work Officer and The Role of the Registered Social Worker in Statutory Interventions which complement it, we have endeavoured to provide accessible, clear and pragmatic advice to promote an understanding of the key accountabilities of practitioners and employers and what needs to be in place to discharge these statutory roles.

While the underpinning principles of social work are readily accepted, the task of translating these into practical guidance for the day-to-day environment with the complex relationships and responsibilities that exist between employers and practitioners, practitioners and the people they work with was indeed a challenge. I think, however, we have managed to produce a suite of materials which can add value in highlighting what good arrangements look like and what needs to be in place to achieve these.

While we have focused these materials on the registered Social Worker, there is resonance and applicability for other practitioners delivering social services, and indeed for employers, whether dealing with social workers or allied staff.

I thank the group for their constructive engagement, unwavering commitment and good natured discourse. As ever, while this marks the end of the work of this group, it is only a step on the road to realising the aspirations of Changing Lives and requires all of us to seize the opportunities to continue to learn, build on good practice and new ways of working to achieve that.

Andrew Lowe
Chair of the Practice Governance Group
Introduction

1. The Scottish Government issued guidance on the Role of the Chief Social Work Officer (CSWO) (February 2009) and the Role of the Registered Social Worker in Statutory Interventions: Guidance for Local Authorities (March 2010) to help clarify the role of the CSWO and ensure that employers and employees have a clear understanding of the accountability and governance involved in statutory interventions with the people with whom they work.

2. This Practice Governance Framework complements these and also draws on the Scottish Social Services Council’s Codes of Practice, SWIA’s guide to Supported Self-Evaluation, COSLA’s guidance to elected members and the Framework for Continuous Learning in Social Services, to highlight the reciprocal responsibilities in delivering safe, effective and personalised practice.

3. The purpose of the Framework is to:
   - Outline the key accountabilities of employers and practitioners and what should be in place to discharge these;
   - Provide a prompt or tool which employers and practitioners can use to assess whether the appropriate conditions are met to ensure safe and effective practice.

4. This can help:
   - Develop and sustain a confident, competent and valued workforce;
   - Ensure an environment and culture that promotes creativity, taking responsibility and the delivery of safe and effective practice;
   - Promote wellbeing and retention of a healthy work/life balance;
   - More effective working with colleagues, other agencies and with people who use services to improve outcomes for individuals, families and communities.

5. While the Framework focuses on the Social Worker, it also has relevance to other practitioners who work in the social services sector. Similarly, while the assumed employer in the Framework is within the statutory sector, there is resonance and relevance for employers in the private and third sector.
The Framework covers 5 key areas:

1. Risk, Discretion and Decision Making
2. Self and Self Regulation
3. Developing Knowledge and Skills
4. Guidance, Consultation and Supervision
5. Information Sharing and Joint Working

For each of these it provides an overarching statement on the area, describes responsibilities for Employers/CSWOs, Social Workers (much of which is relevant to other practitioners also) and provides a descriptor of what this looks like in operation. It can be used as a tool for assessment of whether everyone is clear on their responsibilities and key accountabilities, whether personal or corporate, and if the necessary conditions have been established to promote safe, effective and personalised practice, meet performance objectives and make sure people get the sort of support and services we would like to see for ourselves and our families.

January 2011
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1. Risk, Discretion and Decision Making
2. Self and Self Regulation
3. Developing Knowledge and Skills
4. Guidance, Consultation and Supervision
5. Information Sharing and Joint Working
1. Risk, Discretion and Decision Making
Risk is an essential and unavoidable part of everyday life. Social Workers are accountable for maintaining professional standards and the quality of their work. A focus on assessment and prevention helps to identify and manage risk. Social Workers need to be empowered and supported to make well informed decisions, using their professional judgement and discretion within a framework of accountability.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Employers, in conjunction with Chief Social Work Officers as appropriate, should ensure:</th>
<th>Social Workers should:</th>
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<tr>
<td>- Clear strategic objectives and a robust operational framework are in place to deliver social work services;</td>
<td>- Uphold professional social work values and ethics in their practice;</td>
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<td>- There is clear guidance about balancing risk, needs and human rights;</td>
<td>- Exercise, justify and record professional judgements and decision making;</td>
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<td>- Social Workers are supported to exercise professional judgement and take risks;</td>
<td>- Use, as a basis for approach to risk, discretion and decision making:</td>
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<tr>
<td>- There is a structured approach to assessing and managing risk, drawing on evidence based approaches and supported by robust risk assessment and risk management systems that are routinely audited and monitored; and</td>
<td>- legislation, protocols, codes, guidance;</td>
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<td>- That a framework exists for the development of innovative personalised support informed by relevant risk assessment.</td>
<td>- social work theory, models, practice;</td>
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<td>- best knowledge based practice;</td>
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<td>- evidence;</td>
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<td>- informed opinion; and</td>
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<td>- Develop and maintain knowledge, skills and competence, recognising and working within the limits of their competence.</td>
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What does this look like?

- It is understood, including by elected members, that risk is inevitable and that there is a structure that promotes appropriate risk-taking supported by evidence-based risk assessment approaches;

- Considered risk taking weighs up the potential benefits or disbenefits of taking the risk against not taking the risk;

- Individuals’ understanding and capability to share risk is routinely explored and taken into account in decisions made about social work intervention with them;

- Practice is openly reviewed when things go well or go wrong and learning is identified and shared;

- Social Workers demonstrate enhanced critical decision making skills, backed up by sound evidence and best practice;

- There is clear guidance and understanding of working with risk, including child and adult risk assessment and management;

- Social Workers have the appropriate skills and training to:
  - carry out risk assessment tasks;
  - effectively use the discretion they have to develop innovative, personalised solutions in conjunction with partners and people who need support or services;
  - make, and be able to justify, their decisions; and

- There is an up to date and accurate chronology and analysis to support decisions made.
2. Self and Self Regulation
Social Workers must manage and prioritise work; justify and be accountable for practice; and evaluate their effectiveness in meeting organisational requirements and the needs of individuals, families and communities through safe, effective and personalised practice.

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<th>Employers, in conjunction with Chief Social Work Officers as appropriate, should:</th>
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<td>Ensure compliance with all relevant Codes of Practice; legislation; standards; training; organisational and inter-organisational guidance;</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ensure Social Workers receive effective support, supervision, and feedback which supports ongoing self-regulation;</td>
<td>Maintain professional registration and comply with post registration training and learning requirements;</td>
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<td>Provide an effective line management structure that provides an escalation system;</td>
<td>Take responsibility for their own practice and learning and development;</td>
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<td>Provide effective audit of professional practice;</td>
<td>Reflect and critically evaluate their practice and be aware of their impact on others;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide training and development opportunities for Social Workers; and</td>
<td>Acknowledge and address risk to themselves and others;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Be accessible to all Social Workers who seek assistance, whether because they do not feel able, or adequately prepared or supported, to carry out any aspect of their work.</td>
<td>Maintain appropriate relationships and personal boundaries with people who use services;</td>
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<td>Demonstrate emotional resilience in working with challenging situations and behaviours;</td>
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<td>Use supervision and peer support to reflect on, and improve, practice;</td>
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<td>Seek assistance if not able to carry out an aspect of work, or not sure how to proceed; and</td>
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<td>Use the authority of their role in a responsible and respectful manner.</td>
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### What does this look like?

**Social Workers:**
- Carry out duties using accountable, professional judgement, based on social work knowledge, skills, practice and values, complying with relevant Codes of Conduct, legislation, guidance etc, working in a safe and effective manner;
- Are aware, and consider the impact, of their own values, prejudices, ethical dilemmas and conflicts of interest on their practice and on other people;
- Challenge discrimination, disadvantage and other forms of inequality and injustice;
- Maintain clear and accurate records and provision of evidence for professional judgements, in an accessible and appropriate manner;
- Use risk assessment policies and procedures to address whether behaviours of people who use services present a risk of harm to themselves or others; and
- Proactively manage their own training and development needs as an integral part of their job.

**Employers/CSWOs**
- Have in place systems and approaches to promote a climate which supports, monitors, reviews and takes the necessary action to ensure Social Workers comply with professional, legal, organisational and operational requirements, and have the confidence and competence to deliver safe and effective practice.
3. Developing Knowledge and Skills
Continuing learning and development of knowledge and skills is essential to improving practice and outcomes for individuals, families and communities. Engaging in learning and development, linked to organisational and individual priorities and objectives, supports service improvement.

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<th>Employers, in conjunction with Chief Social Work Officers as appropriate, should:</th>
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<td>• Ensure there are planned and strategic approaches to learning and development, within a learning culture which is open and fair;</td>
<td>• Routinely review and update knowledge of legal, practice, policy and procedural frameworks;</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Provide access to, and actively promote, a wide range of formal and informal learning and development opportunities;</td>
<td>• Use supervision to reflect on practice and use critical analysis to support social work interventions;</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Provide opportunities for involvement in research and putting this into effective practice; and</td>
<td>• Keep up to date with relevant research through reading the journals, learning from other professionals and listening to service users;</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Support arrangements for Social Workers to share and apply learning to their practice.</td>
<td>• Continually evaluate and learn from practice; and</td>
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<td>• Engage in critical analysis and research.</td>
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What does this look like?

- There is a learning culture in the workplace which promotes and supports continuously improved practice and performance, including opportunities for critical feedback on that culture;

- Social Workers make effective use of the SSSC Continuous Learning Framework and involvement in professional networks;

- There is a strategy for learning and development based on the learning needs of social workers, workforce planning needs of the organisation and local and national priorities developed by CSWOs, Social Workers and people who use services and their carers;

- The impact of learning on practice is evaluated systematically and is used to inform planning;

- Social Workers at all levels contribute to the continuous improvement of practice which is encouraged and valued;

- There is a clear link between organisational and operational priorities and objectives, personal learning and development plans and activities; and

- There is an environment that promotes engagement in research and applying evidence and knowledge based practice.
4. Guidance, Consultation and Supervision
Reflective practice, coupled with an environment which promotes wellbeing, a healthy work/life balance and appropriate accountability, supports improving practice and ongoing professional development to deliver improved outcomes.

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<th>Employers, in conjunction with Chief Social Work Officers as appropriate, should:</th>
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<tr>
<td>■ Provide effective supervision and employee development systems, that link individual performance to services and outcomes for people;</td>
<td>■ Actively seek, and engage fully with, supervision on a regular basis to reflect on their practice and identify areas for development;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>■ Maintain effective systems to allocate work and manage workloads;</td>
<td>■ Undertake regular analysis and assessment of the quality of their practice including reflection on engagement and interventions with people; what is going well; what requires to change; and identifying and addressing barriers to safe and effective practice;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>■ Provide regular communication of priorities, policies and standards;</td>
<td>■ Ensure clear guidance on balancing risk, needs, human rights and consultation is readily available to Social Workers who are making such judgements.</td>
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<tr>
<td>■ Ensure regular audit of the quality of social work practice is carried out; and</td>
<td>■ Manage and prioritise their workload within organisational policies and priorities.</td>
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What does this look like?

- Organisational policies, priorities and standards are formally recorded, communicated, evaluated and audited on a regular basis which is specified and the results/response made known to managers and Social Workers;
- Casework is formally recorded and audited periodically by senior managers;
- The role of the Chief Social Work Officer in providing professional advice and guidance, and how these can be accessed, is clearly communicated and understood;
- Social Workers routinely consult with their peers and others to inform practice, share lessons learned and meet continuing professional development needs;
- There is a formal supervision policy which is communicated to, and understood, which requires that supervision be used to support effective professional practice that:
  - reviews workload and associated stress levels, balances best practice requirements with organisational policies, procedures and priorities; and to support professional judgement and continuous development;
  - specifies the minimum time and frequency of supervision for all Social Workers/other staff/staff with particular needs;
  - requires managers to record when and why sessions are cancelled/cut short;
  - makes clear that this is a reflective process and both managers and Social Workers should undertake appropriate preparation by analysing their practice, identifying challenges and potential solutions and considering development needs;
  - requires the main points raised to be recorded and signed off by both manager and Social Worker.
- There is a clear process for handling professional disagreement, including the role of the line manager and CSWO in providing advice and support with respect to professional standards and decision-making. There is clear guidance on how this is recorded; and
- Social Workers are encouraged to raise issues/seek assistance and guidance from their supervisor outwith formal supervision, and the organisation has systems in place to allow the reporting of anything that might impede safe and effective practice.
5. Information Sharing and Joint Working
Effective information sharing and joint working across different agency boundaries are essential to the provision of high quality integrated care and support. They are also an important aspect of local multi-agency systems of child, adult and public protection.

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<th>Employers, in conjunction with Chief Social Work Officers as appropriate, should:</th>
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<tr>
<td>■ Ensure the value of joint working and information sharing is promoted amongst Social Workers and that confidentiality and a right to privacy in private life is understood and complied with;</td>
<td>■ Take the necessary action to understand the roles and responsibilities of key colleagues in other agencies;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>■ Provide clarity of accountability and responsibility for case management in any joint working arrangements;</td>
<td>■ Recognise significant information relating to child, adult and/or public protection and communicate it timeously to other key agencies;</td>
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<tr>
<td>■ Ensure Social Workers have a clear and shared understanding with colleagues of other agencies of their respective responsibilities for the identification and management of risk;</td>
<td>■ Acknowledge the value of, and respect, the contribution of colleagues from different disciplines;</td>
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<tr>
<td>■ Have in place information sharing protocols with all relevant partnerships;</td>
<td>■ Actively promote and co-operate fully in joint working to ensure people receive personalised and appropriately integrated services;</td>
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<tr>
<td>■ Ensure IT systems are used, where appropriate, to provide integrated and single assessments, and speedy information sharing;</td>
<td>■ Understand and apply agency policy for handling and sharing sensitive or highly confidential data; and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>■ Ensure Social Workers are appropriately trained, with other agencies, on the purposes and processes of information sharing; and that</td>
<td>■ Identify dilemmas of respecting confidentiality and the importance of information sharing and seek support to address these issues.</td>
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<tr>
<td>■ Professional supervision is provided to social workers where their line manager is a professional from another discipline.</td>
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What does this look like?

- High quality integrated services are delivered through effective partnerships;
- Good, regular multi-agency training is in place;
- There are effective links within and across agencies to monitor and manage risk;
- There is good use of technology to support information sharing and joint working promoting integrated and single assessment processes such as MAPPA\(^1\) or SSA\(^2\);
- All agencies promote the uptake of “universal” supports and services where appropriate;
- Partners have good systems to resolve operational disagreements with appropriate recourse to senior managers when needed;
- Accessibility to services is straightforward and personalised; and
- Confidentiality and privacy are respected with due regard to legislation on Data Protection, Human Rights and Equalities.

\(^1\) Multi Agency Public Protection Arrangements
\(^2\) Single Shared Assessment