



Meeting of the Cross-Party Group on Social Work

Wednesday 27 April 2022, 18:00-19:45

Access to Care and Support

Minute

Present

MSPs

Fulton MacGregor MSP (Convenor)
Paul O’Kane MSP (Deputy Convenor)

Invited guests

Dr Emma Miller
Colin Slasberg

Non-MSP Group Members

Alison Bavidge (Scottish Association of Social Work)
Jonny Adamson (Scottish Association of Social Work)
Anne-Marie Monaghan (Scottish Association of Social Work)
Anne Kane (Individual Member)
Ben Farrugia (Social Work Scotland)
Charlie McMillan (Scottish Commission for People with Learning Disabilities)
Diane Fraser (Individual Member)

Cross-Party Group on Social Work
Secretariat: Scottish Association of Social Work
Tel: 0131 221 9445 **Email:** cpgsocialwork@basw.co.uk

Donald MacLeod (Self-Directed Support Scotland)
Eileen Stewart (Individual Member)
Flora Aldridge (Social Work Scotland)
Fiona Culbert (Individual Member)
Gary Spolander (Individual Member)
Hannah Graham (Individual Member)
Hannah Tweed (The Alliance)
James Carle (Scottish Care- attending on behalf of Karen Hedge)
Jenny Miller (PAMIS)
Jessica Nielson (Social Worker's Union)
Jo Savege (Scottish Association of Social Work)
John McGowan (Social Worker's Union)
John Watson (UNISON)
Joyce Johnston (Care Inspectorate)
Jude Currie (Scottish Association of Social Work)
Julie Paterson (Mental Welfare Commission)
Karen Albrow (Individual Member)
Karin Heber (Scottish Association of Social Work)
Kay McMahan (Individual Member)
Keith Dyer (Individual Member)
Kirsten Maclean (Inclusion Scotland)
Laura Mulcahy (CJVSF)
Louise Vaughan (Scottish Association of Social Work)
Lizzie Thomson (CELCIS- attending on behalf of Paul Sullivan)
Ruairi McMurray (Individual Member)
Michelle Drumm (IRISS)
Toyin Adebugba (Scottish Association of Social Work and Minority Social Workers in Scotland)
Peter MacLeod (Individual Member)
Robert White (ILF)
Sarah McMillan (Scottish Association of Social Work)
Shunhanna Hussain-Ahmed (Coalition of Carers in Scotland)
Tracy Fagan (Individual Member)

Observers

Biba Brand (Care Inspectorate)
Rob Byrne (Member of Staff for Fulton MacGregor MSP)
Danielle Schull (Individual)
Sam Harrison (Individual)
Iain Ramsay (Individual)
Iona Colvin (OCSWA)
Jade McKellar (Individual)
Peter Scott (Individual)
Russell Hogarth (Individual)
Victoria Bannerman (Individual)

Apologies

Caroline McDonald (Scottish Association of Social Work)
Sharon Jackson (Head of Schools of Social Work)
Lindsey Young (Scottish Association of Social Work)
Alison Keir (Royal College of OTs)
Simon Massey (Children in Scotland)

Agenda item 1- Welcome and Introductions

Fulton MacGregor welcomed attendees to the second meeting of the Cross-Party Group on Social Work and asked for agreement of the minutes from the last meeting. John McGowan proposed the minutes, which were seconded by Hannah Tweed. Fulton provided a brief parliamentary update, explaining that most parliamentary business has returned to normal following the pandemic. However, it's not likely that cross party groups will be allowed to meet in-person until September. The group will need to have a discussion at a future point to decide arrangements for meetings going forward.

Agenda item 2- Mentimeter Exercise and Presentation

Presentation One

Fulton introduced the first presenter, Dr Emma Miller, who is a qualified social worker, academic and driver of the Personal Outcomes Network, to present on the challenges of accessing care and support in the current system. Emma explained that her presentation will focus on the problems with eligibility criteria and started by describing the work of the Personal Outcomes Network. She highlighted that prioritising outcome shifts the focus of engagement to a negotiation with the person about where they want to get to in their life. The types of outcomes are process (how people engage with services), change (something that has changed someone's life) and maintenance (quality of life). Emma then explained that the exchange model is about considering all these different perspectives and working towards an outcome through negotiation. This embeds a focus on what matters to people in our systems and processes, which is made harder by eligibility criteria. Emma mentioned that eligibility criteria was introduced with good intent to provide equity, fairness and consistency but, instead, the requirement to focus on deficits in order to achieve the right banding has not worked. She showed that the lack of preventative focus meant that people require more expensive support later on, while simultaneously undermining good outcome focused practice by diverting focus from a person's strengths. Emma finished by saying that alternative models have had significant success and that we should be open to hearing about them.

Mentimeter Exercise

Fulton thanked Emma for her presentation and introduced Anne-Marie Monaghan to take the group through the mentimeter exercise. Anne-Marie asked the group if they or someone they know or work with has been unable to get the help they need because their circumstances or their situation is not deemed to be serious enough yet. She then asked those who answered 'yes' to use three words or a very short phrase to describe how it affected them or the person that they know or work with. Some of the words included 'soul destroying', 'blatant disregard for your human rights', 'frightening', 'fearful', 'despondent', 'isolating', 'frustrating', 'patronising', 'unsafe' and 'powerless.'

Agenda item 3- Presentations

Presentation Two

Anne-Marie thanked everyone for their contributions and introduced the second speaker, Arlene Howe, via a recorded video link. Arlene had experience of using social work services and began by saying that she wanted to highlight the difficulty she had of getting social work help, how her relationship with her social worker was a lifeline and that earlier support would have prevented her daughter from needing a psychologist. She explained that she had to wait too long for help because of the way the system is designed, which made her problems worse. Managers had argued over whether she met the eligibility to get support and who held the responsibility. Arlene was clear that she would never have got the support she needed without her social worker fighting her corner. Arlene praised her social worker, who took the time to understand her situation and advocate for support. Yet, those two years of waiting and worrying compounded the problems she faced. Arlene is worried that her care package might still be reduced over time and she therefore has no control over her life.

Presentation Three

Fulton put on record his thanks on behalf of the group to Arlene for sharing her story before introducing the third presenter, Ben Farrugia, Director of Social Work Scotland. Ben acknowledged that eligibility criteria has hampered the ability of social workers to carry out their work in line with their core principles and values but added that the discussion must be wider than defining eligibility criteria as good or bad. Instead, the discussion needs to be about understanding why eligibility criteria was introduced and exploring how finite resources can be allocated effectively and fairly. The task is therefore to determine what criteria, structure and models will deliver the most empowering, ethical and consistent decisions. Ben argued that part of the answer is to move power through the system into the hands of people requiring support and to re-empower social workers. This doesn't require new policy or legislation but rather a focus on securing the maximum level of resources and ensuring robust systems are in place to maintain the quality of professional practice.

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Ben offered some final reflections about ensuring that this issue is approached from a whole profession perspective and not just from adult social care. He noted, the need to tackle wider societal views on 'deserving and undeserving' and pursuing early support to as prevent greater negative outcomes rather than simply preventing the need for future support completely.

Presentation Four

Alison Bavidge provided an update on the results of the mentimeter exercise. 39 out of 50 votes were cast for question one and 100% of respondents answered "yes" to knowing someone or experiencing themselves needing support but not getting it. Alison highlighted that the impact on mental health and the detrimental effect on people's relationships and wider aspects of life were how people described the experience. Alison then introduced the final speaker, Colin Slasberg, who is a social worker, commentator and academic. Colin started by explaining that prevention is supposed to maximise independence in order to minimise demand on public resources, but this has not been the case. The two conventional approaches to prevention, that it requires low level intervention and it happens through preventative services, is not backed up by evidence. Instead, research shows that support for social and emotional needs rather than practical and personal needs is cheaper and leads to greater wellbeing. Colin argued that eligibility criteria should not exist. Instead, social workers should be freed up to use their skills to help the individual decide what they need to achieve their outcomes. He proposed that budget holders be freed up to make case by case decisions about funding based on their professional and evidence informed judgement on what will have the greatest impact for the person, both in the present and the future. Only then can we be sure that every penny is being used to maximise independence and thereby reduce demand upon public resources. Colin finished by saying that abolishing eligibility will mean losing the current political comfort of eligibility and thresholds managing limited public funds, but the potential rewards of this could be immense.

Agenda item 4- National Care Service Overview and Group Discussion

Anne-Marie highlighted some of the points from the National Care Service consultation process about accessing care and support. Eligibility was seen as a barrier to accessing care, with people being screened out and not getting help immediately. Limited resources also means that assessments are based on available funding rather than individual needs. The system was described as complex and challenging to navigate, with support varying depending on location. So social workers are not being allowed to focus on realising people's rights because they are hampered by eligibility thresholds and cost. Anne-Marie explained how she hoped this could provide some context for the forthcoming group discussion.

Alison opened up the discussion to the group and brought in Keith Dyer. Keith queried the point from Colin's presentation that we need to create the political pressure to resource a system that meets individual needs, saying that this might cause waiting lists similar to those the NHS has struggled to manage over the years. This would make it unlikely to get support from politicians.

Colin was not available to respond due to technical issues, so Alison asked Charlie McMillan to come in. Charlie said that the system is broken and funding is not being spent to support people to deal with the discrimination and inequality they face. The current system tries to help people to live within their situation rather than change it.

Alison handed over to Shunhanna Hussain-Ahmed who said that support is about more than budgets and is about enabling people to have some control over their lives, so they have autonomy over decisions affecting them. This would require shifting the responsibility of social workers from being gatekeepers to navigators.

Alison brought in Russell Hogarth who said that early intervention works, whereas social exclusion costs money, health and jobs. He agreed with Colin's presentation around prevention, noting that people need to be able to live their best lives, particularly those in care settings.

Russell White added that he believes the delivery structure is not getting money to the frontline and we need new eligibility criteria to reframe discussions in a more positive way. Currently, there are 32 social work departments who use different eligibility criteria and operate differently, which does not work.

Frank Reilly highlighted that when the political will is focused then change can be made and resources become available. For example, homelessness was practically eradicated in Glasgow during the pandemic. He added that not all social work happens within social work departments and part of the challenge is considering what happens in third sector organisations, where change tends to happen quicker.

Alison then read out a question from John McGowan who asked how we can encourage more research on how social workers in Scotland use eligibility criteria? Emma Miller agreed that more needs to be done and highlighted that some upcoming events on alternatives to eligibility will hopefully provide a launchpad for this.

Jude Currie commented that Arlene's presentation really struck a chord with her as a social work practitioner. It's not an unfamiliar story in terms of the tussle she has had with colleagues in health and social care when in fact they are not at odds with what they feel will make a difference. Yet, there's sometimes a sense of dejection about what agency they have to advocate. Jude reflected on her time working in self-directed support for children in need, explaining that she was asked to advocate for choice and control but also consider eligibility criteria. She also saw the importance of communicating decisions about care and support confidently and clearly to ensure people's rights are being upheld.

Alison asked Keith Dyer to come back in to repeat his earlier question about whether the political will exists to remove eligibility criteria so that Colin Slasberg can respond now that his connection returned. Colin said that he doesn't know what the political commitment will be as one of the problems with social care at the moment is that it's not politically popular. We need to improve the profile of social care so that it is seen as a good place where good things happen. That means generating real and meaningful understanding about people's lives and the role of society in making people's lives better.

Flora Aldridge explained that Social Work Scotland is looking at the need to reframe social work so that we trigger different reactions from people when they hear about social work. This is challenging because social workers are involved in people's lives at difficult moments, so people associate them with that challenging period. There is a link between that public perception and political support for social work, and it will require a long-term effort to change.

Ben Farrugia added that the conversations the group has had in this meeting are exactly the types that need to be reframed since they are what prime the models that prevent the investment and belief in social work. We need to focus on different frames that are largely about the success of social work and social care, not about its failures. Referring to broken systems does not lead to greater investment because the instinct of politicians and the public is then to ditch the system, not improve it.

Charlie replied to say that the public already know that they system is broken because they live within it and experience it. We need to recognise this in order to reframe, not ignore the fact it is broken. He added that he is proud of what the social work profession achieves and he believes in social work leading the conversations for change.

Colin asks to come in to address an earlier point about there being 32 different approaches to eligibility criteria. He says that reforming eligibility isn't an option because its very nature is about creating a binary choice to ensure spend matches budget, regardless of the local authority. So, the question is not whether to reform or abolish eligibility criteria but rather to retain or abolish it.

Emma adds that whatever the solution is, we need to understand and acknowledge the level of damage that eligibility criteria causes both for people who need support and practitioners. The cost of failure demand must be weighed up against the fear of removing what is quite a harmful tool. This means we need to think about costs in a different way too.

Agenda item 5- Concluding Remarks

Alison wrapped up the discussion and handed back to Fulton for the concluding remarks. Fulton thanked everyone for their contributions, the speakers for their presentations and Alison for chairing the group discussion. He noted that, even

though the group is still in its infancy, it is one of the best attending CPGs that he is involved with this term. He highlighted that the purpose of the group is to engage with the committee structures at the parliament and legislation. He would therefore be willing to ask a broad question to the Scottish Government on the discussions at this meeting and will meet with the Secretariat to take this forward so that the group will have a response to discuss at the next meeting.

Fulton also highlighted to the group that a workshop on alternatives to eligibility criteria is being organised as a follow-up event. The workshop will take place on 20 June and will be a hybrid event. Invitations will be sent out once all arrangements have been confirmed and, while numbers will be limited on this occasion, the intention is to run a series of these spin-off workshops exploring alternatives to eligibility criteria over the next year.

Fulton closed by thanking everyone for their hard work.

Date of Next Meeting- TBC- Secretariat will agree a date with the Convenor's office as the next action and communicate this to members.