

Role and Responsibilities: Adult Principal Social Worker (PSW)

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Role and responsibilities: Adult Principal Social Worker (PSW)

The role of the Principal Social Worker (PSW) has developed since 2011 when it was first introduced by the Social Work Reform Board and recommended in the Munroe report. The majority of local authorities now have PSWs and the Care Act 2014 firmly imbedded the PSW role in legislation.

It is recognised, however, that currently the role of PSWs varies across local authorities, both in terms of seniority of role and in the content and breadth of the job descriptions across organisations. We know, through the annual PSW survey, that around two-thirds of Adult PSWs are in what is described as 'hybrid' roles, often carrying their duties alongside management positions. There is also a variation in the positioning of the PSW in the organisation, from consultant practitioners or team manager level to assistant director level, along with differing salaries. Some PSWs are also working across children and adults and others within mental health trusts. The role nationally, therefore, is widely interpreted.

However, there are some fundamental role descriptors which should be included in the job role for every PSW; these are captured in the roles and responsibilities and person specification that follow. These aim to give consistency to the role nationally and addresses a challenge set by Glen Garrod, previous president of the Association of Directors of Adult Social Services (ADASS), to describe, in one place, the role of the PSW, to inform Directors of Adult Social Services (DASSs) of the essential position it holds in local authorities.

PSWs are now a statutory requirement and referenced in the 2016 revised Care Act guidance, which states that the local authority should:

Have in place a designated principal social worker in adult care and support. Local authorities should make arrangements to have a qualified and registered social work professional practice lead in place” **Care Act guidance, section 1.27**

The benefits of having a dedicated and visible PSW ensures that there is professional practice oversight in place to lead, oversee, support and develop excellent social work practice and in turn lead the development of excellent social workers and social care practitioners. The PSW will lead on quality assuring social work practice and this should also apply where local authorities delegate social work functions to NHS Mental Health Trusts or other organisations.

Delegating social work functions to Mental Health Trusts

Most Mental Health Trusts have a lead for social work who has assumed the PSW role in that organisation. Whilst the statutory function still sits with the PSW of the local authority, the inclusion of these roles in national PSW development and the national PSW Network is welcome and important in ensuring the development of excellent social work.

For the social work mental health lead to provide assurance to the DASS, the governance structure needs to consider a direct report line to either the statutory PSW or to the DASS and provide assurance of practice in relation to all delegated functions to the Mental Health Trust. This "role, purpose and key responsibilities" document can be adjusted to fit those roles.

Amongst other tasks the PSW role should also:

- Support effective social work supervision and decision making
- Oversee quality assurance and improvement of social work practice
- Advise the DASS and/or wider council in complex or controversial cases and on developing case or other law relating to social work practice
- Develop practice across adult social care to include support staff who complete assessments and support social work
- Function at the strategic level of the Professional Capabilities Framework (PCF).

The Care Act guidance goes on to state the responsibility of the local authority to support the PSW role by ensuring it is:

Given the credibility, authority and capacity to provide effective leadership and challenge, both at managerial and practitioner level and...given sufficient time to carry out their role.

Care Act guidance, section 1.28

Local authorities should therefore ensure that the role is located where it can have the most impact and profile. Lyn Romeo, Chief Social Worker for Adults, has written to all Directors confirming the importance of the role being located at senior management level, to provide both the necessary strategic influence and professional practice leadership.

Roles and Responsibilities

Below is a description of the PSW role, purpose and key responsibilities to help inform job descriptions and person specifications. These highlight the core areas that should be considered and describe the responsibilities of the role.

Adult Principal Social Worker

Role purpose

To ensure that the highest standard of social work practice is imbedded across the organisation, by providing skilled and experienced leadership and practice knowledge to social workers and social care practitioners, the organisation and its partners.

As a member of the senior management team, contribute to the strategic leadership of services and develop and implement standards which provide a cohesive and high performing social work workforce, embraces cultural change and improves strength-based practice with our citizens.

Key responsibilities

- To lead adult social work practice, demonstrating strong interpersonal skills.
- To lead adult social care practice for other professionals, working across boundaries and considering the whole social care workforce.
- To lead on effective social work supervision and reflective practice.
- To lead on the professional development of social workers, ensuring that staff recruitment and retention are effective and appropriate for students, social workers and social work managers to attract, develop and retain the workforce.
- To lead practice that recognises the strengths of individuals and our communities, ensuring the person requiring support is at the centre of all decision-making.
- Champion the rights of citizens in the context of professional ethics and strategic decision making, using a legal and human rights framework.
- Lead on learnings from best practice to be shared across the service and partner agencies.
- Lead in disseminating learning from Safeguarding Adult Reviews (SARs) to both managers and practitioners.
- To advise the DASS on complex safeguarding cases, ensuring statutory responsibilities are discharged effectively.
- To advise the DASS and wider council members on other complex and potentially controversial cases.

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- Work closely with HEIs and universities to ensure good social work education and programmes that compliment local authority priorities.
- To advise the DASS on fitness to practice issues when they occur.
- To attend senior management meetings as the professional lead for social work.
- Lead the organisation at regional and national forums and feedback national developments in adult social work and influence development of government policy and practice, by taking an active part in professional networks.
- Lead on research and development and implementation of good practice, ensuring links with external research providers.
- Work in partnership with all other agencies raising the profile of social work and ensuring the unique role of social work is understood and valued.
- Work with HR and recruitment to ensure effective workforce planning to ensure recruitment and retention of social workers.
- Complete the annual Social Work Health Check, ensuring the Local Government Association (LGA) Standards for Employers are upheld.
- Complete a PSW annual report as required.
- To provide reports of a high standard to various senior management forums, including partner organisations.
- Support the organisation's vision and priorities both internally and externally.

Contacts and relationships

- Citizens and their communities
- DASSs, Assistant Directors and Lead Member, giving professional advice on complex problems, ensuring they are well briefed on emerging national and local social work issues and implications for local developments.
- Where the PSW is placed within a delegated authority, the equivalent Director and Assistant/Associate Directors.
- Partner organisations, to develop excellent social work practice, raising the profile of the unique contribution of social work and understanding and working across whole systems.

- Regional and national forums, advising the organisation of developments in adult social work practice and influencing a wider agenda.
- Occupational therapy and nursing leads across partnership organisations.
- Chief Social Worker for Adults, regional and national PSW Chairs.

Complexity

- This role is responsible for ensuring adherence to many complex social work functions associated with adult safeguarding and statutory social work functions associated with the Care Act, Mental Capacity Act and Mental Health Act.
- The post holder will be required to balance professional judgements on authority-wide, non-standard problems and will be responsible for putting in place appropriate and complex partnerships. This will require excellent negotiation skills and the need to find solutions where there are many conflicting factors.
- The environment in which the post-holder will work is complex and challenging and the role requires a range of both analytical skills and sensitivity, as well as political awareness and sound judgement.

Person specification

Criteria	Attribute	Essential	Desirable
1	Qualifications and education and professional registration		
1.1	Professional social work qualification (e.g. Degree, DipSW, CQSW or CSS as relevant)	E	
1.2	Post-qualifying learning, extensive evidence of CPD	E	
1.3	Registered Social Worker with HCPC/Social Work England	E	

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Criteria	Attribute	Essential	Desirable
2	Experience and knowledge		
2.1	Extensive post-qualifying experience and at least 2 years senior management experience	E	
2.2	Detailed knowledge of adult safeguarding practice, legislation and research	E	
2.3	Detailed knowledge of the qualification and competency frameworks of social work professionals	E	
2.4	Extensive knowledge of relevant legislation and experience of applying in complex settings	E	
2.5	Experience as Practice Educator/supervisor	E	
2.6	Demonstrable experience of successful change management		D
2.7	Working with social work training providers		D
3	Skills		
3.1	Excellent analytical skills, ability to interpret data and devise action plans based on results	E	
3.2	Ability to communicate both orally and in writing to a wide range of audiences (including ability to write clear and concise reports and presentations)	E	
3.3	Ability to influence and negotiate with a range of stakeholders	E	

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Criteria	Attribute	Essential	Desirable
3.4	Ability to understand and work with whole system change		D
3.5	Ability to challenge and influence at all levels	E	
3.6	Digitally capable, supporting social work to utilise these skills effectively to support people and carers	E	
3.7	Able to work independently, manage own time and prioritise work	E	
4	Personal attributes		
4.1	An effective communicator demonstrating a high level of interpersonal skills	E	
4.2	Upholding the values of social work in what you say and what you do	E	



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