

# Social work in Scotland



Prepared by Audit Scotland

Councils' social work departments provide essential services to some of the most vulnerable people in society. The services they provide to children, adults and families, and other specific groups, aim to transform people's lives.

Councils spent over £3 billion on social work services in 2013/14, 29 per cent of their total budget. In 2014, councils provided social work services to over 150,000 people, around 80 per cent of whom are 65 and over. They include 36,751 adults in care homes and a further 1,470 children in various types of residential care.

Demand for social work services has been increasing, particularly among older people. At the same time, budgets have been reducing, creating significant challenges for social work services.

Councils and health boards are implementing new integrated health and social care arrangements, which are to be in place by April 2016. The combination of increasing demand for services, reducing budgets and significant organisational change may result in increased risks for social work services.

## Why is this audit important?

An audit of social work services in 2015/16 is timely as there is a complex and challenging agenda for change in social work services at a time of significant financial pressures:

- There has been little change in the percentage of NHS and council budgets spent on community-based services over the past decade.
- The implementation of self-directed support gives people control over an individual budget but requires councils to transform many of their processes and procedures.
- There are significant staffing challenges in the social services sector, including recruiting and retaining experienced staff and concerns about terms and conditions.
- Spending on free personal and nursing care (FPNC) has increased significantly.
- Councils are tightening the criteria people must meet to be eligible for help and are focusing resources on people with acute needs, creating challenges in making the shift towards prevention.
- The Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 is leading to significant changes in social work practice.

## What will the scope of the audit be?

The audit will look at:

- the scale of the financial and demand pressures facing social work
- what strategies councils and their partners are adopting to address these challenges
- whether councils have effective governance arrangements, including elected member leadership and oversight of social work services

- the impact of financial and demand pressures on service users and carers and how councils involve users and carers in service design.

We will not be specifically looking at health and social care integration, but we will consider its impact on social work governance arrangements. We will be liaising closely with Audit Scotland colleagues currently undertaking audit work in this area.

## How will we carry out this audit?

We will build on the work of previous audits including, [Commissioning social care](#) (March 2012), [Reshaping care for older people](#) (February 2014) and [Self-directed support](#) (June 2014) and link to current audits on [Changing models of health and social care](#) and the position statement on [Health and social care integration](#).

We will gather evidence using a range of methods including analysing data, reviewing documents, interviews with staff and elected members in councils, and focus groups with service users and carers. We will carry out fieldwork and case studies in a small number of councils to better understand the specific challenges in meeting care needs, key developments, examples of good practice and strategies and plans for the future.

## What impact will the audit have?

The report will provide an independent assessment of the scale of the challenges facing social work services and how councils are addressing these challenges. This will be timely as councils move into new integrated health and social care arrangements. The report will identify areas for improvement and examples of good practice.

## Audit timetable and contact

We plan to publish a report in Summer 2016. Audit Scotland is carrying out this work on behalf of the Accounts Commission. If you have any questions, please get in touch with John Lincoln, Audit Manager, on 0131 625 1864 or at [jlinc@audit-scotland.gov.uk](mailto:jlinc@audit-scotland.gov.uk)



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