



Post title	Senior Practitioner
Division / Section	Support to Children and Young People
Department	Children Services
Responsible To	Team Manager, Child Protection Resource
Number of post holders	40+
Acting up/ Secondment	N/A

Purpose of Job

The Council recognises the need to establish a clearer, more comprehensive remit for the role of the Senior Practitioner within Children's Services and formalise its acknowledgement of the key, ongoing contribution of the role to the improvement of social work service delivery by experienced social workers who have reached the required stage of personal and professional development.

The primary purpose of the Senior Practitioner role is to undertake direct/indirect work with service users, carers, and adopters, particularly where the demands of complex problems require advanced social work practice skills.

The role also has a key part to play in raising standards of social work practice through the application and sharing of advanced knowledge, skills and experience within the wider service area and the Council as a whole.

Whilst the Senior Practitioner job description is generic and provides for the full range of major tasks and job activities at this advanced level of social work practice across all service areas, the actual mix of tasks and activities of any individual Senior Practitioner post will depend on the objectives and nature of the service area specialism.

Major Tasks

The percentages provided of total time required are indicative in general terms only and will be subject to amendment depending on the specialist area of work undertaken by individual post holders related to the needs of the service or through involvement in the development of policy, practice, or procedure.

Assess strengths, risk and needs of referred clients, carers, and adopters as part of a specialist team/service operating within a multi-agency context.

(20% of total time required)

1. Take full responsibility, within normal arrangements for accountability, for managing a caseload through the delivery of direct professional social work service to children and young people/vulnerable adults and/or their families/carers/adopters with particularly complex needs, or where personal liberty and/or safety is at stake. Focus on achieving the best possible outcomes for clients, ensuring their safety, protecting, and promoting their rights.

(60% of total time required)

2. As an experienced practitioner, make a significant contribution to evaluating, developing, and maintaining high practice standards and the improvement of service delivery to the service user.

(10% of total time required)

Contribute, through the delivery of learning, support, and other measures to individual staff members or on a wider scale, to the acquisition of knowledge, practice competence and professional development of social work staff, for example:

Assessing and reporting on the practice competence of social work students on placements
Supporting and guiding less experienced Social Workers/Social Work Assistants, in conjunction with team management. Working with colleagues, for agreed timespans and specific work areas where additional input and support from a senior practitioner has been identified by line management as likely to be beneficial.

(10% of total time required)

Job Activities

1. Assessment of strengths, risk and needs of referred clients, carers, and adopters

Ensure preparation for social work contact and involvement is based on review of all relevant information and documentation and decide best form of initial involvement.

Provide clear and accurate assessment of an individual's and his/her family/carers'/adopters' needs in line with statutory guidance, appropriate form, and level of social work intervention.

Demonstrate an understanding of the context of child development or vulnerable adult living and influencing factors to establish the needs of the individual; ensure all relevant parties participate in assessment and decision making.

Assess and balance risk and protective factors within a child or adult protection/safety framework.

Produce comprehensive and concise written and verbal reports based on analysis of complex evidence.

Maintain flexibility of approach in response to new evidence and review assessment accordingly.

Assess and manage risk to children/vulnerable adults and their families/carers/adopters and all other relevant parties/agencies and the wider public.

Balance the rights and responsibilities of individuals and relevant parties/agencies with the associated risk to them or the wider public.

Provide expert guidance and support as required to social workers, Council staff and other agency colleagues undertaking risk assessments.

2. Manage a complex caseload

Plan, implement, review, and evaluate care plans against desired outcomes with individuals and their families, relevant groups, carers, communities, and other professionals. Use advanced social work

knowledge and experience to inform the management and prioritisation of a complex caseload including critical assessment of urgency and requirement for action, adhering to statutory regulations and Council procedures.

Conduct planned interventions using the most appropriate methodologies.

Use research findings and statutory guidance to inform social work practice.

Compile and present concise reports about complex information in line with formal responsibilities to meet the requirements of statutory procedures and the courts. Respect the rights and responsibilities of all service users and carers.

Authorise payments to persons in need for own cases/carers in line with departmental guidelines/cash limits.

Chair internal/external meetings as appropriate and undertake joint working on an agreed basis with team management.

Direct work within specialism

Referring to the 'Purpose of Job' section, 'Direct Work within Specialism' provides an indication of the type of specialist tasks and job activities a Senior Practitioner working in a particular service area will be expected to undertake.

Illustrations:

Children's Social Work Practice Teams:

Ensure all matters relating to the protection of children are dealt with in accordance with Council and multi-agency procedures including timescales.

Children affected by Disability:

Undertake the full range of children's social work services but focusing on children and families on issues relating to disability, assessing need, and developing effective support packages with particular regard to requirement of Section 23 and 24 of the Children (Scotland Act) 1995. Research/develop skills, knowledge and expertise on disability issues and resources for children with special needs and their families; share with colleagues and contribute to specialist professional advice provision city-wide.

Family Based Care:

Focus on family placement work including:

Recruiting, assessing, training, and reviewing carers/adopters

Designing creative placement and service solution to support children and carers

Supporting carers, their families and the children placed with them in particularly complex and challenging situations.

Chairing linking and co-ordinating meetings.

Advising staff on particularly complex childcare cases

Integrated Community Support Service (ICSS):

The Senior Practitioner role focuses on:

Providing a range of interventions across a number of integrated facilities within ICSS over a 24-hour period, 52 weeks of the year for the provision of care and crisis outreach and accommodation services to young people aged 11-16 and their families.

Facilitating the provision of a direct alternative to accommodation and helping young people remain in their own communities.

Ensuring a coherent response to young people and their families in need of immediate assistance as a result of circumstances that threaten to propel them further into the formal care system.

Adult Social Care:

Ensure all matters relating to the protection of adults at risk are dealt with in accordance with Council and multi-agency procedures, including timescales. In collaboration with line managers and senior social workers, develop and implement plans to meet the specific outcomes service users contribute towards the promotion of improved services.

To undertake the duties of a Mental Health Officer (MHO) as detailed in legislation and within the requisite timescales, in particular to ensure effective provision of:

Duty to enquire.

Requests for assessment and consent to Emergency Detention and Short-Term Detention

Applications for Warrants to force entry into premises.

Requests for MHO reports in relation to applications for private guardianship

Applications for Compulsory Treatment Orders

Preparation of Social Circumstance Reports

Assessment and application for local authority intervention and Guardianship Orders

Preparation of reports for Court where a mental health disposal is being considered.

Preparation of reports for Scottish Government and Mental Health Tribunals in relation to Mentally Disordered Offenders

Supervision of MHO practice placements

Duties relating to other specialist adult social care roles (e.g. cancer/palliative care) will be articulated as part of the development of the job profile in the establishment of the specific post.

3. Make a significant contribution to evaluation, development and maintenance of high practice standards and the improvement of service delivery to the service user

Work collaboratively with other senior practitioners and relevant staff to input into social work development and standard-setting forums.

Build and maintain a detailed working knowledge of relevant legislation, developments in practice theory, research, national and Council policies and objectives. Take a proactive role in disseminating such information in an informative and comprehensive format tailored to audience need.

Undertake research and analysis to support improvements in, and promote/develop the ongoing delivery of, a high standard of professional practice across the team and the achievement of good standards of care and service. Devise and promote new methods and approaches to enhance service provision.

Represent the team/service area on and participate in inter-agency working groups. Represent the Council on national forums & other networks/external bodies where required.

Partnership with other agencies

Include assessment and professional views from other agencies to achieve a comprehensive assessment of a child/vulnerable adult and his/her family or carers/adopters.

Take the lead in working collaboratively with other relevant agencies to ensure best outcomes for service users at an individual level and for service provision within the community. Build and maintain a network of agencies and contacts to ensure the desired service provision for children/vulnerable adults and their families.

Equal Opportunities

Demonstrate through personal and professional example commitment to equality of opportunity for staff and service users. Use substantial knowledge of different groups, races and cultures to challenge and tackle racism & discrimination directed at children/vulnerable adults and their families/carers/adopters.

4. Social Work Staff Development and Support

Provide proactive guidance and direction to social workers and other staff particularly in relation to collaborative or joint working to meet required standards of practice.

Provide coaching and mentoring to designated individual staff tailored to individual need and against objectives agreed with the team leader/line manager.

Facilitate the training and professional development of social workers and other relevant staff either directly or using appropriate resources, in response to learning needs identified through the Performance Review and Development process.

Where required to act in the role of Practice Assessor, assess and report on the practice competence of social work students undertaking social work training.

Supervision and Management of People

Line management of social workers, social work assistants and community care assistants (i.e. discipline, absence management, recruitment) rests with the Team Leader or other member of the management team and not this post.

The Senior Practitioner will, however, be expected to provide mentoring, support and regular consultation to social work staff, and consultation and expert advice to staff from partner agencies. Most issues with work quality will be resolved by the Senior Practitioner in conjunction with the staff member. Significant ongoing issues will be referred to the Team Leader/Line Manager. Senior Practitioners who hold the Practice Teaching Certificate will have responsibility for social work students as allocated.

Creativity and Innovation

Use appropriate investigative analysis tools to ensure client needs are comprehensively identified and assessed.

Provide the lead on the most demanding and challenging cases, with particularly complex problems, including life threatening illnesses or where personal liberty and/or safety is at stake.

Compile comprehensive, concise, and relevant written reports based on analysis of complex evidence will support key recommendations and decisions in the management of individual cases. Balance observations and conclusions reached with a flexibility of approach where new evidence and the need to review assessment outcomes become apparent.

Draw on advanced social work practice skills and significant experience of managing complex cases to achieve an appropriate balance between the rights and responsibilities of individuals and relevant parties/agencies with the associated risk to them or the wider public.

In the provision of expert guidance and support to social workers, Council staff and other agency colleagues undertaking risk assessments, ensure conveyed in a clear and understandable format which meets the needs of specific audiences.

Create and implement tailored care plans to address the problems and needs of service users, both short-term and long-term, by various means, e.g. negotiating assistance from schools, or health providers, referring children/vulnerable adults and families for group work sessions etc.

Working within a multi-agency context, plan and deliver a range of integrated, flexible, and imaginative solutions for children/vulnerable adults within the hearing/care systems.

Take a lead within the team in developing training plans and commission or deliver training or other learning opportunities in conjunction with Team Leader/Team Manager.

Provide less experienced staff with structured support and encouragement to facilitate the development of their skills and abilities.

Function as a team resource by using advanced skills and experience to mentor staff, share specialist knowledge, support less experienced colleagues in decision making and share responsibility for maintaining morale and upholding good professional standards.

Plan and prioritise workload effectively within a framework of against a background of changing legislative framework and Council policy.

Contacts and Relationships

Ongoing contact with children/vulnerable adults, parents and carers and adopters whose cases are the post holder's responsibility. This contact will be with individuals who are frequently difficult to engage with, vulnerable and/or seriously ill.

The post holder will regularly play a key role in child/vulnerable adult protection cases, dealing with police, courts, health etc. Regular professional contact with staff from other organisations e.g. negotiating packages of care.

Having responsibility for supporting staff with their cases requires ongoing contact with social workers and social work assistants/community care assistants, giving them guidance on cases, joint working including accompanying them on visits and to meetings where appropriate, and developing their skills and abilities.

The post holder also has a role in reviewing changing policy locally and nationally and developing training for staff, either delivering it personally or commissioning it from elsewhere.

Decisions (Discretion)

Decide how to take own allocated cases forward effectively, balancing the competing needs of individual children/vulnerable adults and their families/carers/adopters and the resources available.

Decide when to intervene in a case held by another member of staff, in a way which supports the effective progress of the case and develops the knowledge and skill of the individual member of staff.

Take action to escalate a deteriorating child/vulnerable adult situation to management or other involved parties to manage risk and safeguard against further potential harm.

Decide when a child should or should not be removed for reasons of child protection or when a vulnerable adult requires placing in safety.

Decide/recommend, as a chair or member of professional panels on the future of individual children or vulnerable adults or on the registration/review/ de-registration of carers and adopters.

Assess risk of harm and vulnerability in respect of children and vulnerable adults and their families referred to service and requirement for priority support.

Decisions concerning the safe management of individuals/groups and assessment regarding what action to take, particularly during a crisis response.

Practical arrangements for the inclusion of children/vulnerable adults and families/carers/adopters within the service.

Assessing key tasks and responsibilities for achieving required outcomes within service and requisite timescales.

Decisions (Consequences)

As part of the management of a complex caseload, decisions and recommendations made about the care arrangements of children and vulnerable adults may have both short and long-term consequences for the individual's quality of life and potential life chances as well as affecting families/carers/adopters.

Decisions taken to escalate concerns about deteriorating situations may have beneficial consequences for the individual but adversely affect their families etc.

The use of advanced social work knowledge and experience will inform the quality of the management and prioritisation of a complex caseload. For example, impacting on the critical assessment of urgency and requirement for action whilst adhering to statutory regulations and Council procedures.

Deciding how to plan and conduct interventions using the most appropriate tried and tested methodologies will affect the effective ongoing management of cases.

Resources

The post is responsible for consistently delivering a bespoke social work service balancing risk and protection within a legislative and policy framework to some of the city's most vulnerable children and adults and their families/carers/adopters.

Environment – Work Demands

The post holder will be required to plan and control use of their own time and activities within agreed objectives and targets. Timescales will vary and may be both short and long-term with associated impact on the complexity of identifying and quantifying direct post holder's contribution over time.

The intensive nature of the work involved in supporting children and vulnerable adults and their families/carers /adopters; resolving complex, urgent and/or long standing difficulties which may impact on their current or future circumstances, can place considerable work demands on the post holder who needs to remain objective and professional if quality of service delivery is to be maintained.

The post holder will require determination to maintain the required focus in order to manage complex cases and achieve desired outcomes.

Immediate resources from stakeholders may not be as readily available as the post holder would want or have the time to devote to joint work. In these circumstances, the post holder will need to re-determine, and focus on obtaining the minimum essential involvement from stakeholders.

The post holder will be expected to escalate, for example, deteriorating client circumstances or situations and to follow matters through until problems or issues are resolved.

Environment – Physical

Regular, daily use of a computer, for example typing reports; recording work activities; reading/interrogating data.

Environment – Working Conditions

Whilst the post holder will be based in an office environment within a team context, regular or ad hoc home visits may be required as part of the management of a complex caseload or interfacing with clients in other settings. This may expose the post holder to disagreeable working conditions for the duration of the time away from the office.

Environment – Work Context

Visits to clients will frequently involve lone working with vulnerable individuals and their families who may be difficult to engage with and/or present challenging/fluctuating behaviour. In these circumstances the post holder will need to risk assess the continuation of the visit to keep self safe.

Emotional resilience will need to be maintained when managing complex situations professionally in potentially upsetting circumstances e.g. where abuse is evident.

Knowledge and Skills

The following knowledge, skills, abilities, and recognised / required qualifications are necessary for the competent performance of all the duties and responsibilities of the job:

Degree in Social Work or equivalent is essential together with registration with the Scottish Social Services Council as a condition of continued employment.

Possession of a post social work registration qualification relevant to the specialist service area, e.g. Child Protection Certificate; Practice Learning qualification; Mental Health Officer Award; Certificate in Adult Protection, or other equivalent qualification, is essential.

Experience of taking full responsibility for the most complex cases and working within a multi-agency environment.

Significant previous experience within senior practitioner specialism.

Ability to apply social work theory and research to the achievement of solutions to complex problems and client difficulties.

Extensive up to date working knowledge and understanding of social work legislation, principles and values is essential.

Experience of managing and prioritising own work.

Experience of coaching, mentoring, or counselling others and the ability to develop others' practice.

Computer literacy and the ability to use in house data recording and reporting systems.

Ability to communicate coherently and concisely with a wide range of clients and professional staff; produce detailed written reports which address issues and clearly set out/justify recommendations.

Organisation Structure

The actual organisation structure within specific work sectors and individual teams will depend on the specialist service provided by Children and Families or Health and Social Care.

The under noted chart is a composite example of team structure incorporating the role of Senior Practitioner.

