

ADVERTISING FEATURE

# Strategy can help perfect practice

The Scottish Social Services Council seeks a strategist to oversee national social services practice. By **Ken Mann**

**Q**UALITY social services provision is central to the fabric of any caring community. It follows that the vocational education and regulation of practitioners – across all social services disciplines – is crucial to skilled, effective delivery and protecting the interests of users.

In Scotland that's a task that falls to the Dundee-based Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC), a body that seeks to raise the standards of practice by social service workers while helping assure the satisfaction of the nation's citizens.

It publishes the SSSC Codes of Practice for all those working in the social services domain and their employers, whether private, public or third sector. With a vision of "a competent, confident workforce capable of delivering high quality services, that has the confidence of the public, those who use services and their carers", it is intrinsically customer-focused on both ends of the service spectrum.

The SSSC is now seeking a new Director of Fitness to Practise – over-

seeing the element of its remit that deals with regulation – as the current director is retiring. It's likely to be a dynamic role, set against a backdrop of change in the way social services are evolving, and within a more general context of public provision.

Chief Executive Anna Fowlie explains: "The current Director is retiring in March, having been with the SSSC since it was set up. The successful candidate could come from a range of backgrounds – we're not looking for someone from any particular discipline.

"The most important thing is to be an experienced manager who is able to think strategically and see how regulation fits into the wider purpose of the SSSC.

"They should have a good understanding of workforce regulation and of social services in Scotland. As well as protecting the public, a central aim of the SSSC is to improve public trust and confidence in social services.

"It's important to remember the vast majority of people working across social services do a good job

and provide a high standard of care.

"When they don't, we take action to make sure they are removed from working in social services, or take remedial action to bring their practice up to the standards required.

"We take this role very seriously, and it is that element of our work that the Director of Fitness to Practise will head up."

Overall, around 189,000 people work in social services across Scotland.

They operate within a challenging context of changes in society itself, such as people living longer – often with complex health conditions, substance misuse, poverty and the impact of welfare reform.

Combine that with severe financial constraints on public services and it's easy to see how an often hard job is made more difficult.

There is a constant state of ongoing improvement demanded by Government, employers and users.

Legislation, working codes and operational ethics – designed to fine tune services to need and intended outcome – can provide a seemingly

complicated minefield through which social services professionals must navigate.

Thankfully a more balanced approach prevails at the SSSC.

"At the SSSC, we see regulation as one tool in the improvement box," Fowlie insists. "We have (the) Codes of Practice for workers and employers, and our Register is based on workers having the right qualifications as well as being of good conduct and character.

"We also regulate and develop qualifications and we produce a variety of workforce development and planning tools. Increasingly, we're looking at digital learning tools and collaborative learning across different professions and with the people who use social services.

"We see education and learning, combined with codes of practice, as fundamental to raising standards and improving the outcomes and experiences of people using social services. Public services, in general, are at a critical point. For years we've been saying that things will have to

change. Now we need to stop talking about it and actually do it.

"What we have is unsustainable and not delivering the best outcomes for people. That's not just about money, it's about public expectations and awareness. We can see that in social services, where we have a profession that needs to grow in confidence to demonstrate the unique contribution it makes.

"The social service ethos is person-centred and collaborative so whether we work with children and young people, the elderly, people with mental health problems or offenders, we should be right at the centre of new ways of operating.

"We've come a long way in delivering excellence and there's a way to go, but for me the 'game changer' is breaking down some of the territorialism, not focusing on structures and inputs but on outcomes for individuals, families and communities.

"At the SSSC we can contribute – by ensuring that people working in the sector have the right skills, confidence and values to do that."



**PROFESSIONAL CARE:** SSSC Chief Executive Anna Fowlie is searching for a Director of Fitness to Practise who has strong strategic and managerial skills.

## ORGANISATION'S RESPONSIBILITY

SSSC was created under the Regulation of Care (Scotland) Act 2001 as an answer to calls from several quarters to establish a mechanism for improvement across the social sector.

In an extensive remit, it:

- Maintains a register of social workers, social services workers and social work students.
- Approves a range of qualifications for people working in social social services including social work and early years.
- Provides grants and bursaries for postgraduate social work training
- Publishes the SSSC Codes of Practice – setting out the standards social service workers and their employers should meet.