



Social care factsheet

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Information on the Commission's work with children and young people and the work of the Children's Rights Director

Introduction

Launched in April 2004, the Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) is the single inspectorate for social care in England and is a completely new organisation. The legislation that created CSCI – the Health and Social Care (Community Health and Standards) Act 2003 – gives it greater powers and responsibilities than those held by the bodies it replaces.

CSCI combines the work formerly done by the Social Services Inspectorate (SSI), the SSI/Audit Commission Joint Review Team and the National Care Standards Commission. CSCI's remit is greater than anything seen before in social care, allowing a more rational, integrated system of social care inspection and regulation.

What is social care?

'Social care' covers all the different types of support that people may need in order to live as independently, safely and fully as possible. It covers a huge range of services, including residential care homes, meals on wheels, fostering services and drop-in centres for disabled people.

It doesn't include medical care, but many social care services operate alongside health services – such as where an elderly person returning home after a hospital stay may require nursing visits and help around the house and with shopping. They sometimes work alongside education services as well – for example, where a teenager convicted of a crime is placed in a secure residential training centre.

Local councils, private companies and charitable organisations are all involved in providing social care services. Overall, around one in 25 of the national working population works in the social care sector.



Are all social services provided by the local council?

No, they're not. Councils have a legal responsibility to find out what sort of social care their local residents need, and to provide or commission that care. They do that partly through council-run services, and partly through services they buy in from private or charitable sector providers. Among other things, they care for more than 200,000 people in their own homes and provide around 15,000 nursing and residential care homes.



However, local councils in England play an important role in commissioning and providing social care. Around 60,000 children a year are cared for by local authorities, in residential homes or schools, placed with foster carers or on temporary placements with their parents. Around 3,400 children a year are adopted from being in local authority care. Councils also have a duty to support young people coming out of care at the age of 16 or over.

Additionally, councils are responsible for the social care needs of older people and people with disabilities in their areas – for example, by arranging the provision of nursing or residential care and day and domiciliary care services. The largest group of adult users of social services is people aged 65 or over.

Are all the people working in social care social workers?

No, they're not. Over a million people work in social care services, and some of those certainly are social workers (although they don't all have the job title of 'social worker'). However, there are a lot of other staff working directly with the people using the services – for example, a home carer visiting someone's home, staff running day centres and care workers in residential homes.

Others are involved in running projects or work within bigger organisations. This is a sizeable and complex sector, and a lot of different roles are needed to cover the full range of things that social care organisations do.

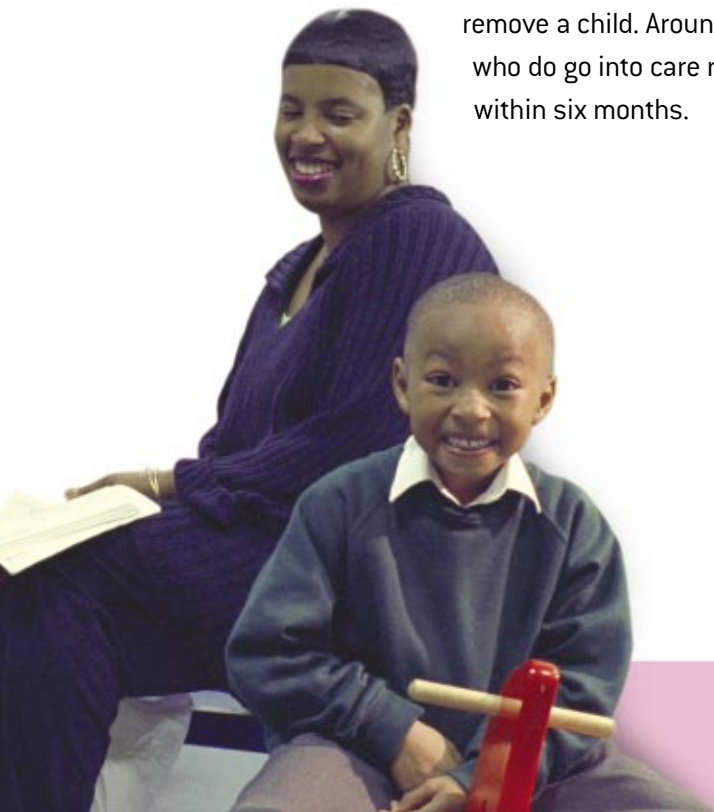
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Can social workers take my children away?

The Children Act 1989 rests on the belief that children are best looked after in families, and social workers aim to keep families together wherever possible. For example, they visit families who are experiencing difficulties to help them get the support they need, or organise respite care where families need a break from looking after a severely physically or mentally disabled child.

If they have extremely serious concerns about a child's health, safety or welfare, social workers can agree with the family to take a child into care temporarily. Where this is not possible, as a last resort, social workers do have the power to apply to the courts for an order to remove a child. Around two thirds of the children who do go into care return to their families within six months.



How do I get services?

Through your local council's social services, who should also be able to provide you with information about what social care is available in your area. You will probably have to answer a number of questions to establish whether you are entitled to any of the services the council is responsible for.



If you are entitled to council services, the next step is an 'assessment'. This means someone from social services will visit you and discuss with you and your family what you need and what your options are.

Many people buy their services privately for themselves or a family member without coming into contact with the council's social services at all. Perhaps they buy a place in a private residential care home for a relative, or pay a carer to come into a person's own home every day to help with getting dressed, providing meals or trips to the shops.

However, all social care services in England, whoever runs them, will be inspected regularly by the new Commission for Social Care Inspection.

Is there any help available with paying for private care?

Yes, but it depends on where you live and on what income or savings you have. Each local council has different financial 'thresholds', but the overall rule is that the less money you have, the less you will pay.

Depending on your reasons for needing social care, you may also be entitled to claim extra allowances or benefits, which would help your general financial situation.

You could hire a personal carer or pay for other sorts of care at times and places that suit you.



Do I have to accept the social care I'm offered, or can I take the money instead and spend it on the care I'd prefer?

Most social care services are delivered to people who want or need them and should aim to meet those needs. An assessment is made of the individual's needs and a recommendation made about what services that person should receive.

However, if you are over 18 and have a disability, which includes elderly people with care needs, or if you qualify under the Carers and Disabled Children Act, you should be entitled to receive from your council, in the form of a 'direct payment', some or all of the money your social services department would spend on you. This means you can directly arrange and pay for your own care. You can't use this money to pay people who already live with you, but you could hire a personal carer or pay for other sorts of care at times and places that suit you.

Many social care organisations and disabled people's organisations are very enthusiastic about direct payments and hope to see them promoted and taken up much more widely.

There are, of course, occasions when care is compulsory and cannot be refused – for example, where a child is taken into care; or, very occasionally, an adult with very serious mental health problems which threaten their own or someone else's welfare or safety.

Do people in different parts of England get different sorts of care?

Yes, and part of the job of the new Commission for Social Care Inspection is to look at this. At the moment, someone assessed in one area may be offered very different care from someone elsewhere; it depends on what is available locally and on what the care costs in that area. The Commission will compare value for money across the country – what will £100 buy in one area compared to another? – and it will also compare the different social care options available in different parts of the country.

How do I complain about the care that I'm getting, or someone else is getting?

Currently there are two complaints procedures – one for regulated services like residential homes and the other for council social services departments. The new Commission in its first year will continue with the existing complaints procedures for regulated services, which means that any individual can complain to the Commission if they are unhappy with the service delivered by a provider.

During its first year, however, the Commission will carry out a full review of these procedures and from 2005 will integrate them with the review activity of complaints made against social services departments. Any proposed changes will be widely consulted on and implemented very carefully.

What about children in care - what can they do, if they're unhappy with their care?

If a child is being helped by social services, or living in a children's home, boarding school, residential special school or FE college, or is in foster care or being adopted, there is a special complaints procedure they can use if they are unhappy with their care.

Every local council that runs social services has a special complaints procedure for children to use. A child can talk to someone they trust to help them decide if they want to make a complaint, or simply ask a person they trust about how to make a complaint. Either way, it is the child's decision.

In addition, the commission also has a Children's Rights Director. Dr Roger Morgan is the 'children's auditor' and his job is to make sure that the Commission carries out its duty to safeguard and promote the rights and welfare of children. On behalf of the Commission, and separately from inspections and reviews, he regularly consults children and young people in services the Commission inspects.

