

# The role of the Designated Social Care Officer (DSCO)

Learning from the Council for Disabled Children's Accelerated Working Groups on Social care and SEND.



The social care landscape is increasingly complex with a number of relatively new pieces of legislation, such as the Children and Families Act 2014; the Care Act 2014; and the Children and Social Work Act 2017 all of which must interact with the existing duties set out in the Children Act 1989 and section 2 of Chronically Sick and Disabled Person's Act 1970 when we are thinking specifically about disabled children and young people and those with SEN.

In 2018 the Council for Disabled Children (CDC) facilitated a series of regional multi-agency action learning sets (ALS) focused on particular social care and SEND practice areas. As a result of these sessions we identified three key areas that were particularly tricky issues for areas to identify and implement solutions to. In order to support the development of effective ways to move these issues forwards we brought together small national working groups to start to develop and test some solutions.

One of the AWGs sought to explore the different ways that Local Areas are developing their approaches to ensuring high quality social care input and engagement with the EHC needs assessment and planning process with a particular focus on how different roles are supporting coordination of social care input. Participants in the group felt it was important to acknowledge that social care is a complex system and children and young people may have many different assessments or plans at any one time, such as:

- Early help
- Child in need
- Child protection
- Looked-after children
- Pathway plans, PEPs and others

The group considered whether there could there be similarities to the role of the DMO/DCO and the role of the DSCO began to take shape.

Many of those who were involved in the AWGs, and those practitioners who have attended our events, have suggested that they may be an 'accidental DSCO' either in part or in full and we have worked with those who are working in this way in practice to start to build a picture of the role and to understand some of the ways this could improve outcomes.

We have developed a job description and a person specification for the role which can be found in appendix 1. These documents build on the discussions from the AWG which explored some key principles in relation to the responsibilities of a DSCO:

### Core values

- The individual should have a commitment and passion for SEND, for communicating and coproducing with families and inclusion

### Oversight

- Across social care services for disabled children, young people and adults, and those with SEN, e.g. identifying need, EHC plan process, providing information and advice in the local offer

### Coordination

- Ensuring social care services are reflected in the local offer, coordinating EHC assessments with other social care assessments (CIN/CP/LAC reviews, PEPs etc.), understanding thresholds

### Strategic development

- Joint commissioning, integration of services, participation and engagement of families. Role modelling joint working and maintaining meaningful dialogue and coproduction with partners, CYP and families

The group also explored the key knowledge, skills and characteristics needed to fulfil the role:

### Professional knowledge

- The DSCO must have knowledge of social care practice in order to provide and quality assure advice about children and young people, make recommendations about need and provision and contribute to formulating outcomes.

### System knowledge

- Working with multi-agency teams to develop new process, e.g. knowledge of the national landscape, local structures and processes for children, and adults' services.

### Data and information

- Ability to collect, interpret and use data to facilitate wider understanding the needs and resources of the local population, and to influence commissioning

### Professional skills

- Building relationships with a wide range of partners, communication and influencing skills

### Management skills

- Both operational and strategic. Skills and aptitude are more important than substantial experience

### Influencing change

- The DSCO must be able to influence change and persuade decision makers and practitioners
- Resilience in managing change is important

### Networking

- Building and maintaining professional networks, seeking learning and information, and keeping relationships with partners and parents effective

### Problem solving and creative thinking

- Identifying opportunities to improve or innovate services or approaches.
- Thinking creatively about alternatives
- Constructively challenging the status quo.

### Leadership Behaviours and Professional Competencies – an example from Essex

#### Acts Strategically

- *Inspires* - Displays a passion for making a difference. Creates and shares an ideal image of what we can become and motivates others to see exciting possibilities for the future.
- *Innovates* - Thinks radically, takes risks and is prepared to make mistakes when looking for new ways to improve services. Sees disappointments as learning opportunities and seeks opportunities to challenge and change the status quo.

#### Engages People

- *Enables* - Builds energised working relationships. Creates an atmosphere of trust, respect and dignity so others feel able to experiment with new or innovative ways of working.
- *Collaborates* - Creates and develops networks and involves others to first understand their point of view and then join together in a common purpose. Crosses internal and external organisational boundaries to improve and deliver shared solution and services in ways that achieve mutual gain.

#### Achieves Results

- *Delivers* - Develops strategy and plans to enable the reforms agenda to become embedded in social care operations and practice.



### Getting started – An example from Hertfordshire

Hertfordshire County Council are trialling the role of Designated Social Care Officer (DSCO) for SEND as part of their 3 Year, SEND Transformation Programme. The developing role is intended to improve partnerships and understanding across the SEND System to improve the experience of local citizens.

Hertfordshire County Council recognise that they are not consistently meeting the needs of their SEND population. Review and evaluation has identified that the integration of education, health and care is too often inconsistent and not driven by user outcomes.

Education Health and Care Plans are not joined up and nor are they sufficiently personalised. The role of social care for children and adults is not widely understood in the wider SEND System.

#### Aims and objectives

- Better outcomes for children, young people and parent/carers
- A system leadership trio that can focus on EHC system, understanding it, aligning practice and driving practice improvement
- Better information sharing and a shared language in delivering learning, care and support.

#### Key activities of the role

- Regular meetings with DMO/DCO and SEND Lead
- Shared Ownership of SEND Self-Assessment/Self Evaluation
- Oversight of Performance information and QA of Practice
- Review & Contribute to Local Offer and Graduated Response to SEND Social Care
- Develop Programmes of Training and Development for SEND (incl. Multi Agency)
- Establishing and monitoring processes to co-ordinating Assessments and Planning
- Informing strategic commissioners regarding joint commissioning and integration of services.
- Providing Social Care Leadership in Send Transformation
- Ensure suitable professional advice is available to support system effectiveness

*The following example person specification, job description and accountabilities and responsibilities were drawn up through dialogue with representatives from Hertfordshire, West Sussex and London Borough of Enfield.*

#### Job Description

This role will strategically lead in framing and developing social care elements of the SEND strategy across the local authority, in compliance with legislative requirements of the SEND Code of Practice (2015).

The role will directly inform and influence the direction of wider SEND services through intelligence and insight.

The leader will have in-depth knowledge, and understanding of both social care operations and the SEND reforms agenda and will identify areas where social care is weak or non-compliant with the SEND Code of Practice - generating solutions and implementing strategies and plans to address this - aligning these to social care's operational and business plans and statutory obligations.

Key to success will be the ability of this leader to negotiate with and influence others, build and nurture effective partnerships, working collaboratively with a wide range of stakeholders across the LA and exploiting opportunities for co-production. The role will act as the regional and national interface, representing LA social care at key regional and national events, and will be a source of expert professional advice on SEND reforms relating to social care within the county.

#### Key responsibilities

A strategic role accountable for developing strategies, action plans and processes which support and enable the SEND reforms agenda to become embedded within social care operations and practice.

Contributing to and influencing SEND organisational design, and assisting in the development of 0-25 Children & Young People with Disabilities Service and its policies.

Establishing and leading a network of social care SEND 'champions' and link workers. Facilitating and overseeing the implementation of the SEND agenda within social care through this network, and gathering insight and intelligence from them and other groups such as the parent carer forum to inform future planning.

Responsibility for developing social care aspects of the Local Offer that provide relevant advice and information and meet all legislative requirements.

Analysing complex and varied work strands across functions, services and agencies in order to identify and exploit opportunities for co-production and integrated working between social care, health and education to progress SEND reforms agenda.

Working collaboratively with social care directors and service managers to ensure social care meet statutory responsibilities under the Children & Families Act (2014) and Care Act (2014), and to drive forward organisational culture change aligned to the SEND reforms.

Constructively challenging practice, systems, processes and protocols to enhance SEND reform compliance as part of this collaboration.

Responsibility for framing social care elements of the local authority's self-evaluation process to ensure readiness for SEND Ofsted & CQC Inspections.

Involvement in and initiation of varied multi-stakeholder projects and work streams. Themes include: participation and engagement, person-centred approaches, joint working initiatives, outcomes frameworks, operational function design, IT systems connectivity, EHC processes, quality assurance, joint commissioning, Early Years, Preparing for Adulthood, the Local Offer.

Contributing to social care workforce development by formulating programme of blended learning/training relating to the SEND reforms across varied audience profile and functions.

## Person Specification

### Essential

- Educated to degree level (or equivalent by experience) with experience of working in social care sector
- Relevant experience of working with children and young people with SEND and their families
- Relevant experience of leading, mentoring, and supervising the work of others
- Evidence of knowledge, understanding and practice in relation to the implementation of SEND legislation, particularly within social care
- Thinking creatively and challenging the norms: existing practice, process, protocols
- Understanding, analysing and presenting complex information effectively.
- Experience of successful working with a wide range of stakeholders including children and young people, parents and carers, and those within social care, education and health (including the voluntary sector)
- Successful experience of implementing organisational change by identifying issues/barriers, generating solutions, and planning and developing how these will be implemented in a cross-function, cross-organisation environment

### Desirable

- Evidence of effectively and sensitively dealing with a wide range of people regarding difficult and complex issues including the use of effective negotiation
- Understanding and responding to differing perspectives and taking a cross organisational view
- Problem solving across a range of issues and across organisational and agency divides
- Communicating clearly and persuasively both orally and in writing to a varied audience profile, including writing reports, guidance, templates, presentations, training materials and programmes
- Strong influencing and confident interpersonal skills to achieve best outcomes for children and families whilst balancing Social Care and the local authority's interests



## About the Council for Disabled Children

The Council for Disabled Children (CDC) is the umbrella body for the disabled children's sector in England, with links to the other UK nations. CDC works to influence national policy that impacts upon disabled children and children with Special Educational Needs (SEN) and their families. The CDC membership is made up of a variety of professional, voluntary and statutory organisations, including disabled young people and parent representatives. CDC's broad based membership and extensive networks of contacts provides a unique overview of current issues. It also enables us to promote collaborative and partnership working among organisations.

CDC hosts the following networks and projects:

- IASS Network
- Making Ourselves Heard
- Special Educational Consortium
- The Information, Advice and Support Programme
- Transition Information Network

[cdc@ncb.org.uk](mailto:cdc@ncb.org.uk) | [www.councilfordisabledchildren.org.uk](http://www.councilfordisabledchildren.org.uk) | 0207 843 1900



Council for Disabled Children is hosted by the National Children's Bureau.  
NCB is a registered charity No. 258825. Registered in England and Wales No. 952717