

# DSCO Handbook: Implementing the role of the Designated Social Care Officer (DSCO) for SEND.

Learning from the Council for Disabled Children



The social care landscape is increasingly complex with a number of overlapping 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.

Since 2014 and the implementation of the Children and Families Act the Council for Disabled Children (CDC) has been exploring the role of Social Care across the SEND system as part of our role as Strategic Reform Partner to the Department for Education (DfE).

After a series of regional Action Learning Sets held in 2017/18 the development of the role of the DSCO was identified as one of three themes to be developed in more detail through national Accelerated Working Groups (AWGs).

CDC have been exploring the ways that local areas have been developing their approaches to ensuring high quality social care input and engagement with the Education, Health and Care needs assessment and planning process, and the wider SEND framework.

In a national learning event, held in April 2019, to share the outputs from the AWGs we received feedback from over 50% participants that the role of the DSCO was the most likely change to have an impact on improving outcomes.

Since April 2020, CDC have been working to map and develop the DSCO role through the existing online forum and through the development of a national community of practice. Due to the developing nature of the role the forum is open to both those currently delivering the role and those who are in senior roles working to develop the business case for the role at local level. Due to a range of regional and national virtual development sessions, at the time of writing we have 160 members in the community of practice.

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 and the national community of practice 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 for inclusion.

### Oversight

- Across social care services for disabled children, young people and adults, and those with SEN, e.g. identifying needs early and developing pathways for those not currently known to social care; EHC needs assessment and planning process; providing information and advice; 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 etc.); understanding thresholds for social care support.

### Strategic development

- Joint commissioning; integration of services; participation and engagement of families, including role modelling joint working and maintaining meaningful dialogue and coproduction with partners, children, young people 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.

### The Head of Service for SEND and Head of Service for Children in Care, Care Leavers and Disability 0-25 in Buckinghamshire

jointly developed a business case for implementation of the role and agreement was reached for joint funding between Education and Children's Social Care. They have appointed to the role which commenced in January 2021.

Their aspirations for the role include:

- A focus on unblocking barriers for children and families
  - Enabling children and families to access the right services at the right time
- Acting as a resource to teams to explore services for children in line with the Local Offer and improving understanding of the Local Offer by professionals and families
- Improved professional understanding of the EHC needs assessment and planning process
- Embedding a culture of co-production in support of children's needs assessments and EHCPs
  - Improvement in the quality of EHCPs, including Section A in relation to social care
  - Improved understanding of Social Care processes by professionals in Education



## What 'problem' are we trying to fix?

- Better outcomes for children and families
- Improved social care input to Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCP)
- Bringing the Social care and SEND systems together
- Improving knowledge and understanding of SEND across all areas of Social Care
- Improving knowledge and understanding of Social Care across the SEND system

## Identifying the potential benefits:

### Joined up working at a strategic level

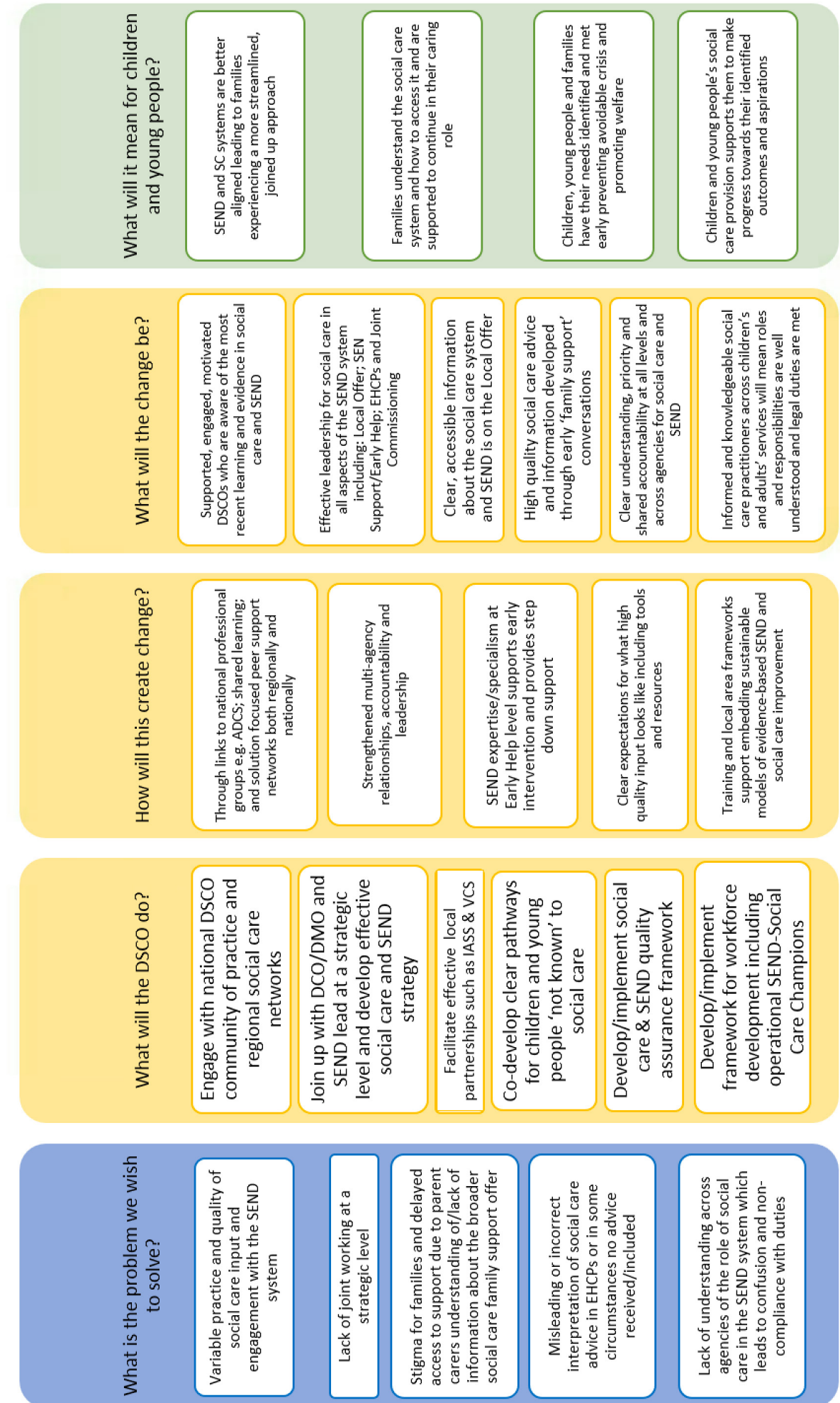
- Regular meetings between DMO/DCO, DSCO and SEND lead
- Shared responsibility for self-audit, leading to more effective shared ownership and accountability across all agencies
- Clarified understanding of roles and responsibilities and facilitated improved relationships across SEN, Social Care and Health

### Capacity to develop and innovate in practice

- Capacity to identify gaps and develop new ways of working, particularly in relation to pathways for children and young people 'not known' to social care
- Potential to impact on both quality and timeliness of advice and information into EHC plans
- More effective early identification of social care needs

### Workforce development

- Analysis of local training needs and development of sustainable models building on existing approaches
- Developing training through the current model of Learning and Development for Social Services e.g. 'learning surgeries model' similar to the way this would be done for domestic violence or Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE)



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 local authority 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:

- [The Information, Advice and Support Programme \(IASP\)](#)
- [The SEND Information Advice and Support Service \(IASS\) Network](#)
- [Making Ourselves Heard](#)
- [Special Educational Consortium](#)
- [Transition Information Network](#)

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



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