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### **Public have more positive view of social work in Scotland**

Attitudes to social work in Scotland improved over the last year according to research carried out for the Association of Directors of Social Work (ADSW). Based on a survey of 1,000 Scottish adults, and carried out by Scottish Opinion, the research shows that more people feel better informed about social work services.

The findings have been published a year on from the launch of the Social Work Changes Lives Campaign by ADSW and the Scottish Social Services Council, which aims to improve understanding of social work. It also coincides with Michelle Miller, Edinburgh's Chief Social Work Officer, taking over as the new President of the Association of Directors of Social Work at the organisation's conference which begins today May 12<sup>th</sup>.

The results show that 47% of respondents rated social work positively compared to 38% the previous year. They also reveal that 80% of people who had used social work services, or whose families had, held a positive view of social work. However, one of the most significant changes was that the proportion of people that were unsure about their view of social work had fallen from 43% to 31%.

"Against a background of negative coverage of social work resulting from the tragic cases of Baby Peter and Brandon Muir, it is very encouraging that there is greater understanding of social work services," said incoming ADSW president Michelle Miller. "I am particularly pleased that users of our services are so positive about what we do. However, there is still a lot of work to do if we are to ensure that the contribution of social work staff is fully understood."

Anna Fowlie, Chief Executive of the Scottish Social Services Council said: "social work is a complex and challenging career. Public understanding of what social workers do is fundamental to building trust and confidence in the profession. It is also essential that we attract great new people into social work training and careers in social services - more positive media coverage will help raise awareness of just what you can achieve when you work with vulnerable people."

The research results show that 39% of those respondents who had not used social work services mainly associated them with child protection. By contrast, 40% of those with experience of social work services most strongly identify them with care of older people.

"In Scotland the Government and MSPs of all parties have been supportive of the role of social work and local authorities have been instrumental in promoting the good work of social workers", added Michelle Miller. "We want to see this support continuing to grow. However, we have to recognise that attitudes are also heavily influenced by the media. In this respect, we all have to work closer to improve the media's understanding and support of the profession and ultimately demonstrate respect for the contribution of social work services."

ENDS

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#### Notes to Editors

- 1) The research was carried out by Scottish Opinion Ltd. with 1035 Scottish adults over 18 using computer aided telephone interviewing (CATI). The sample is weighted to be representative of the Scottish population by age, gender, social grade and region. The interviews were carried out over 5 days from 25 February to March 2 2010. Last year's survey was carried out from February 17<sup>th</sup> to 21<sup>st</sup> 2009.
- 2) Respondents were asked to rate social work services on a scale of 1 to 10 where 1 was very low and 10 very high. Of the overall sample 31% were unsure, 47% rated it at the positive end of the scale (6-10) while 22% rated it 1 to 5. Among individuals who had either used social work services themselves or their family had within the last two years, 80% rated the services positively (6-10). This group totalled 145.
- 3) When asked which service respondents most identified with social work the results were:  
Child Protection: 35%  
Care of older people: 33%  
Supporting families: 11%  
Support for disabled people: 7%  
Mental health: 3%  
Criminal justice: 2%  
Early years: 1%  
None of the above: 1%  
Unsure: 6%
- 4) According to Government statistics the breakdown of social work staff numbers to service area is:  
60% of staff work in adult services (includes work to support those with mental health needs, learning disabilities, substance misuse. Also care for older people including those in care homes or requiring home care)  
17% of staff work in children's services (includes protection, adoption and fostering and family support  
8% of staff work in criminal justice (includes probation and community service)  
6% work in generic social work
- 5) Staff numbers divide into the following work areas:
  - strategic/central 16%
  - fieldwork 39%
  - residential 29%
  - daycare 13%
  - homecare 4%