

# What the public think about Scottish social services and why

REPORT SUMMARY · OCTOBER 2017



University  
of Dundee



Produced by **Iriss** on behalf of the **Social Work Services Strategic Forum**. Based on research commissioned by the Forum and authored by **Dr Trish McCulloch** (University of Dundee), **Professor Stephen Webb** (Glasgow Caledonian University) and **David Clark**.

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# INTRODUCTION

## **Promoting public understanding of social services is important in supporting public value of the sector and the people who work within it.**

This summary presents the key findings of research which set out to better understand public perceptions of social services. It explores the level of knowledge, understanding and attitudes towards social services and the reasons for these views. The research adopted a mixed methods approach, which included a national survey of 2,505 adults and focus groups with members of the Scottish public.

### **CONTINUING THE CONVERSATION**

The *Vision and Strategy for Scottish Social Services 2015–2020*<sup>1</sup> was published by the Social Services Strategic Forum in March 2015. One of its four key work strands is the promotion of public understanding, which is important in recognising the value of the sector and the people who work within it. This research marks the beginning of a conversation around these issues.

The full research report is available at: [www.socialworkscotland.org/what-we-do/publications](http://www.socialworkscotland.org/what-we-do/publications)

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1 <http://www.gov.scot/Topics/People/social-services-workforce/SWSSF/visionandstrategy>

## KEY FINDINGS

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The research findings suggest a good level of support for social services in Scotland and a reasonable level of literacy among respondents about what social services do.

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Overall, people in Scotland are positive about social services' impact on society and believe these services perform an important public role.

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The public has a more positive view of social services than social service workers and institutions perceive.

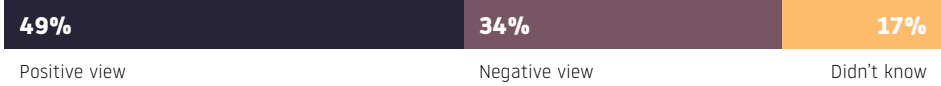


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# Research summary

# POSITIVE PUBLIC PERCEPTIONS

## General impressions of social services



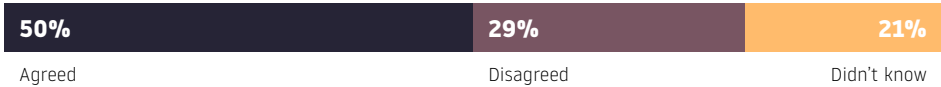
## Social services play an important role in supporting the most vulnerable in communities



## Social services provide a valuable service to the people of Scotland



## Overall the provision of social services in Scotland is good



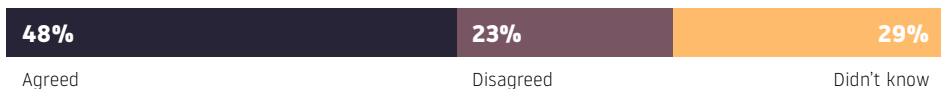
*Overall, the public has a positive perception of social services*

# UNDERSTANDING SOCIAL SERVICES

What level of understanding do you have of social services in Scotland?



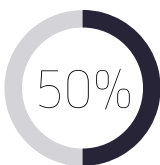
My local area provides people in this area with good social services



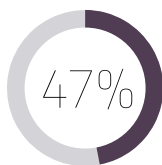
Have you, your family or anyone in your household, ever had contact with social services?



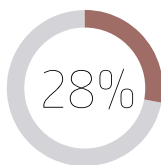
Which types of issues do you most associate with people receiving help, advice, or support from social services? (Top five responses)



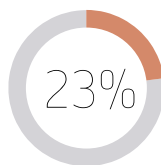
Care or support for older people



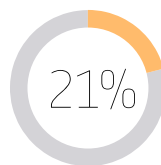
Safety and protection of children



Housing issues



Support in bringing up children



Help with drug or alcohol problems

*Qualitative data showed that personal exposure to services strongly influences public perceptions*

# PUBLIC TRUST IN SOCIAL SERVICES

Social services in Scotland have a social licence to operate (SLO). When we refer to SLO we are talking about levels of social acceptance and public trust. SLO for social services is at the level of 'acceptance' among the public.

## Social services professionals can generally be trusted to do their job well



## Social services are often unfairly blamed when something goes wrong

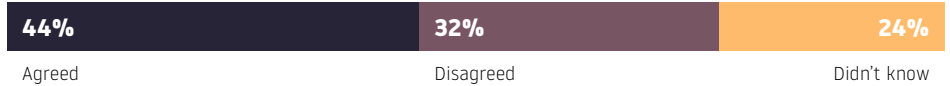


In terms of concerns or support for social services in Scotland, the data provided few correlations between demographic factors of age, gender, socio-economic status and level of education.

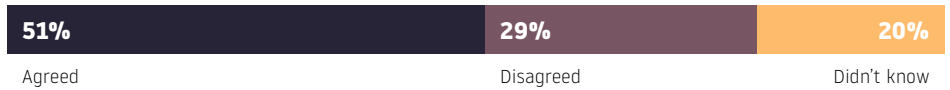
*Data showed that people tend to trust the individual social worker over the service or 'system' they worked for*

# PUBLIC PERCEPTIONS OF SERVICES

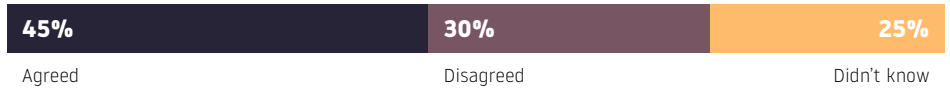
**I feel confident social services will meet mine and my family's needs should I need support**



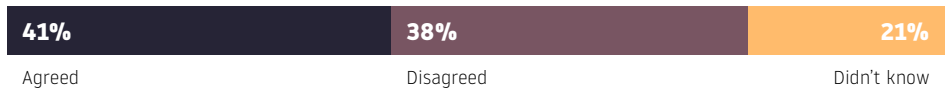
**Health and social services work well together to give people coordinated care and support**



**The Scottish government is doing more to help improve the care for people's lives**



**There should be limits on what is spent on social services in Scotland**



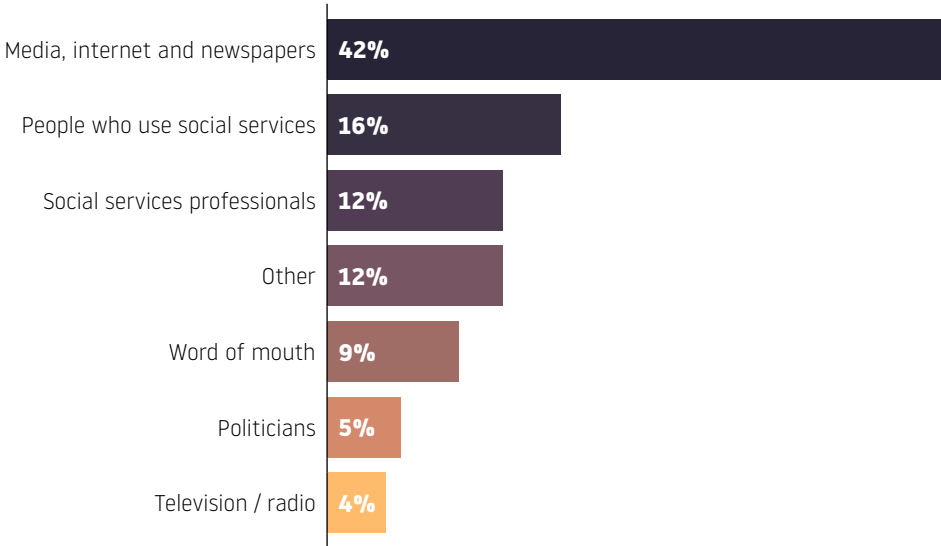
The qualitative data showed that the strain of accessing services for older people, and in particular, understanding and negotiating eligibility, was a common concern. **Visibility, public facing communication** and **public engagement** were considered critical to improved public understanding of social services.

*'Invisible' and hard-to-access social services are significant factors in shaping public perception*



# IMAGE AND REPUTATION

## What is the biggest influence on the image and reputation of social services?



As was perhaps to be expected, the media was perceived to exert the biggest influence on the image and reputation of social services. However, the media's influence in shaping public perceptions was less dominant than people might think. Also, public understanding is less volatile in relation to media attention than is typically believed by practitioners.

*Personal and contextual factors most influenced the ways in which the public understand social services*

