

Building a practice-led system: The role of the principal social worker

Dr Tony Stanley

Chief Social Worker

Birmingham City Council

Key questions for debate

- Why does it take so long to build better systems for children's social work?
- What is practice leadership?
- The principal social worker is underutilised nationally – could offer so much more
- How the principal social worker role is helping to drive improvements in Birmingham City Council's children's services

How did we get here?

- A decade of hardening rules and procedures
- Failure of ICS promise to offer ‘a grip’ on each case
- Scandal politics
- Practice reform agenda/ SWTF/ Munro Review
 - What happens at the frontline today? Who really knows?
 - Narrow definitions of risk shaping practice (e.g. extremism)
- Featherstone et al **‘stop feeding the risk monster’**
- Forrester **‘zombie social work’**
- Connolly et al **‘beyond the risk paradigm’**





Department
for Education

The Prevent duty

Departmental advice for schools and
childcare providers

June 2015

Problems for social work

- An individualising has occurred
- Absent families / not trusting families
- Risk theorising is limited – so is our practice
 - Assess, assess, assess + questionable help
- Psychologising is promoted (grooming narrative)
- Police and social workers = social control
 - child protection plans as paternalist tools
- Social work lacks debate and innovations to date
- Where is our knowledge base coming from?

Look to teaching hospitals

- In teaching hospitals, clinicians are in practice
- Senior clinicians are also involved in
 - Research
 - Teaching others
- Good public confidence and reputations
- High staff morale
- High patient feedback
- Local authorities – senior staff too far from practice
 - Professional currency?
 - Professional leadership?

Understand the practice system

- KSS – practice leaders and supervisors
- PSW/ CSW – Be the public face of social work
- Promote (& build) Practice frameworks
 - Signs of safety
 - ‘Signs of safety and wellbeing’ (early help in Birmingham)
- Practice evaluation
- Social work health check

PSW role in Birmingham

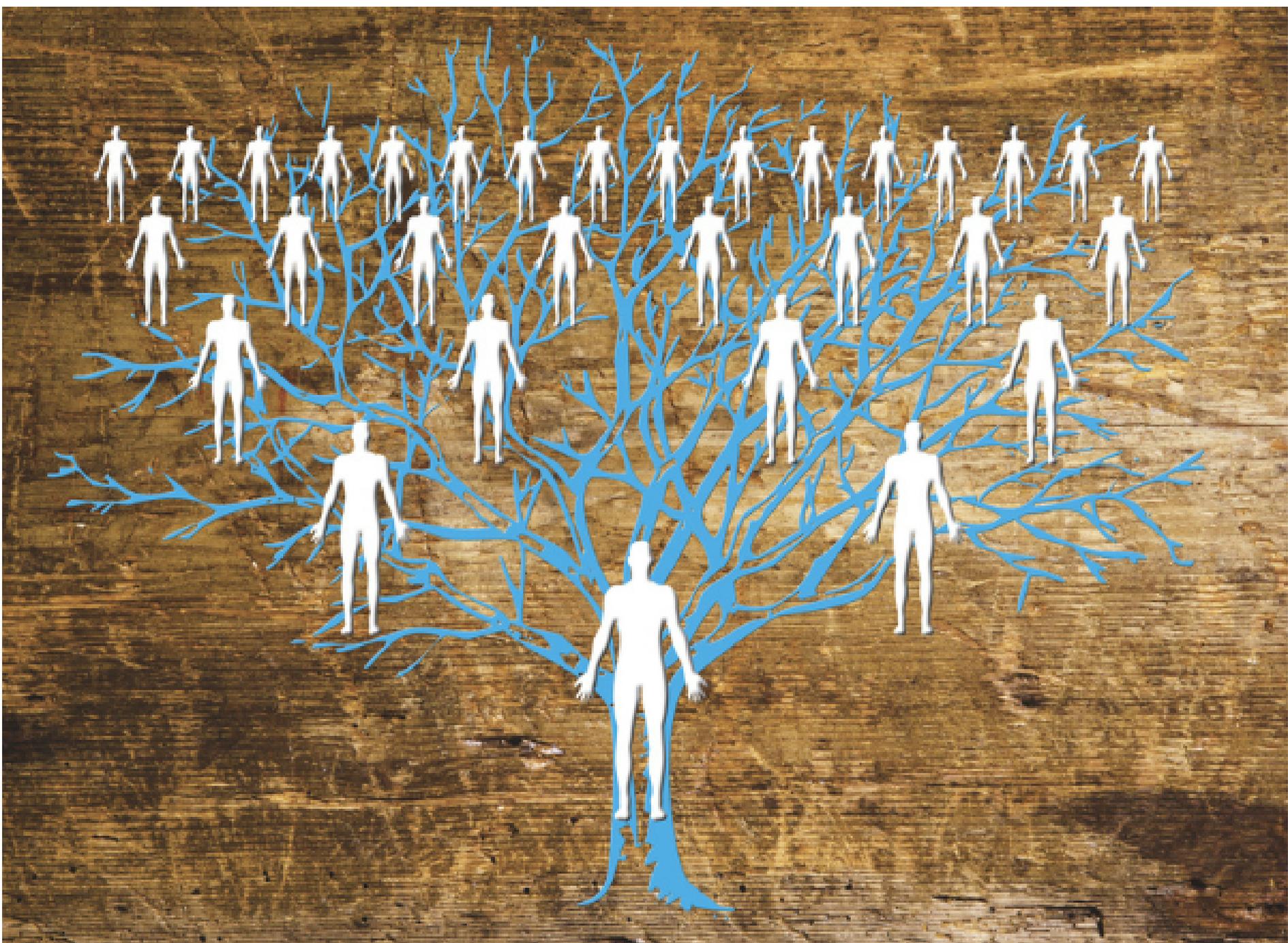
- The Principal Social Worker ... helps to drive up practice standards by promoting a range of theoretical models and practice tools informed by strengths based practice
- Provides analysis about the quality and impact of social work practice
- The PSW is uniquely located at the interface between front line practice and senior management
- Reflect the quality of practice experienced by children and families & highlight areas for improvement
- Offer respectful challenge
- A systems contribution is made by identifying the obstacles to achieving excellent social work practice

Leadership in practice

- Principal social workers need to be in practice
- Ethnographers (observe, co-work, question)
- From the chief executive to the child in 4 steps
- Analysis that informs systems change, e.g.
 - Improved our IT system
 - Led on group supervision
 - Promoting our approach to practice
 - Taking evaluation and research into practice

Be accountable to our profession – transcend the workplace

- Time to be brave and bold
- Social workers and social work
- National reform agenda
- Ofsted are asking the right questions!
- IFSW/ BASW/ (TCSW?), UNcRC
- Codes of Ethics - social justice, human rights
- Social work is in demand



Dr Tony Stanley
Chief Social Worker
Birmingham City Council
10 Woodcock Street
Birmingham B7 4BL

Email: tony.stanley@birmingham.gov.uk