

PRACTICE LEARNING HUB

AI in Social Work

Facilitator Guide: Opportunity, Risk and Professional Judgement

Intended audience	Team managers, practice educators, ASYE leads, lecturers and social workers facilitating reflective learning
Estimated time	30, 60 or 90-minute facilitated discussion after the video; add the video runtime if watching together
Focus	AI literacy, ethics, professional judgement and safe practice
Author	Kayleigh Rose Evans
Website	kayleighroseevans.com/ai-in-social-work.html
Version	Version 1.0 Published August 2026 Review due February 2027

Intended use

This resource supports learning, reflection and discussion about the use of artificial intelligence in social work. It is not legal, information governance or data protection advice and does not replace local AI policies, statutory guidance, professional standards or employer procedures.

Use fictional or fully de-identified examples only. Do not enter identifiable case information into a public or unapproved AI tool. Follow your employer's information governance and AI arrangements.

About this session

This session uses Kayleigh Rose Evans' video *AI in Social Work: Opportunity or Massive Risk?* as the anchor for a structured conversation about what AI may improve, what it may weaken, and how social workers can remain accountable for judgement, relationships and decisions.

The video reflects a profession in which AI is already being used for tasks such as transcription, case recording support and drafting. The session deliberately avoids a simple pro-AI/anti-AI debate. Participants are asked to consider the purpose of the tool, the data involved, the quality of its output and the impact on the person receiving social work support.

Learning outcomes

- Identify common ways AI is being used or proposed in social work practice.
- Explore potential benefits such as reducing administrative burden and improving accessibility without assuming that efficiency equals better practice.
- Recognise risks including confidentiality, inaccurate or fabricated output, bias and discrimination, loss of nuance, over-reliance and reduced transparency.
- Apply professional judgement and meaningful human oversight to AI-assisted work.
- Use the PAUSE framework to decide what questions to ask before using AI in practice.
- Identify one action for local policy, team learning or individual CPD.

Ground rules to read out at the start

All scenarios in this session are fictional. Keep discussion general and do not share identifiable details about people, families, colleagues or live cases.

Different employers use different tools and have different governance arrangements. A tool being technically available does not mean it is approved for a particular use.

Where discussion raises a live information governance, data protection, ethical or practice concern, take it through the appropriate local route.

PAUSE before AI

A five-question practice check for any AI-assisted task.

P - Purpose	What problem are we trying to solve? Is AI necessary, proportionate and likely to improve the person's experience or the quality of practice - not only speed?
A - Approved & accountable	Is this tool approved for this use? Who is responsible for the final record, assessment or decision? What local policy applies?
U - Understand the data	What information is going in? Is it personal or special category data? Where is it processed, retained or reused? Is the minimum necessary data being used?
S - Scrutinise the output	What could be wrong, missing, biased or overly confident? Can every important statement be traced back to evidence and checked by the practitioner?
E - Explain & keep the person central	What does the person need to know about AI involvement? Does the process preserve participation, voice, relationship and meaningful human judgement?

30-minute reflective discussion

0-5 min - Opening: What AI is already present in our work? What feels helpful, uncertain or uncomfortable?

5-15 min - PAUSE: Introduce the five questions. In pairs, apply PAUSE to one AI use participants have encountered or heard about.

15-25 min - Scenario: Use Scenario 1 or 2 from the participant worksheet. Ask each pair to identify one opportunity, one risk and one safeguard.

25-30 min - Action: Each person completes: "One thing I will check before I use or rely on AI is..."

60-minute team session

0-8 min - Opening and temperature check: Where is AI already touching our workflow? What do we think it is good at, and what should remain distinctly human?

8-20 min - PAUSE framework: Work through each question and connect it to local policy or current practice.

20-40 min - Scenario groups: Small groups take different scenarios. Ask them to identify benefits, harms, missing information, safeguards and who remains accountable.

40-52 min - Whole-group debate: "Efficiency is not the same as quality." What would good AI-assisted social work look like? What would poor practice look like even if the output sounds polished?

52-60 min - Practice commitment and CPD: Agree one team action and invite each participant to record an individual learning point.

90-minute development session

0-10 min - Opening: Set ground rules and map current AI use or proposed use across the team.

10-25 min - PAUSE deep dive: Use the framework to distinguish technical capability from professionally acceptable use.

25-55 min - Scenario carousel: Groups rotate through all three scenarios, adding risks, safeguards and questions for the person, practitioner, manager and organisation.

55-72 min - Local practice audit: Choose one real workflow without discussing a live case. Where could AI assist? Where could it introduce new risk? What approvals, training or transparency would be needed?

72-83 min - Principles into practice: Create a team “green / amber / red” list: appropriate uses, uses requiring extra checks, and uses that should not happen without formal approval.

83-90 min - Close: Capture one individual CPD action and one organisational question to take forward.

These plans assume participants have watched the video beforehand. If watching together, add the video runtime before the facilitated section or reduce the discussion activities to fit your slot.

Fictional practice scenarios

Scenario 1 - The ambient note-taker

A local authority has approved an AI tool that can listen during visits and draft a case note. A social worker explains the tool at the start of a home visit. The person agrees, but becomes visibly quieter once recording begins. Halfway through, an adult family member enters and a sensitive disclosure follows. The AI produces a fluent summary that sounds accurate at first glance.

- What needs to be considered about transparency, participation and consent/expectations?
- What would you check before accepting the AI-generated note?
- Could the presence of the tool alter the relationship or what a person chooses to say?
- What should happen when another person enters or the purpose of the conversation changes?

Scenario 2 - The polished assessment

A practitioner uses an employer-approved generative AI assistant to help structure an assessment from de-identified notes. The draft is clear and saves time, but it introduces a confident explanation for why the person misses appointments, softens some of the person's own words, and gives less space to strengths and cultural context than the practitioner expected.

- Which parts of the output require evidence checking?
- How might bias appear even when the language sounds professional?
- Who authored the final assessment, and what does that mean for accountability?
- What could be lost if the practitioner edits for fluency rather than returning to the source evidence and the person's voice?

Scenario 3 - AI-supported prioritisation

A service is considering a system that summarises referrals and flags cases it predicts may need urgent attention. Leaders hope this will support consistency and reduce delay. Practitioners are told that a social worker will still make the final decision, but the score and summary will appear prominently at the top of the referral.

- How might an AI recommendation influence human judgement even if it is not formally "the decision"?
- What groups might be disadvantaged if historical data contains unequal patterns?
- What would meaningful human oversight look like?
- What should people and practitioners be able to understand about how the tool affects the process?

Facilitator cue

Avoid turning the exercise into a quiz about one “correct” answer. The useful learning is in identifying the professional tensions, the missing information and the safeguards needed before AI-assisted work could be considered trustworthy.

Bring participants back to the same question throughout: what remains the social worker's responsibility even when a system generated the first draft, summary or recommendation?

Local workflow audit

For the 90-minute session, choose one ordinary workflow rather than a live case - for example drafting a routine record, summarising policy, preparing questions for a meeting or triaging an inbox. Map the workflow from input to final professional action.

- Where could AI add genuine value, and to whom?
- What information would enter the system, and is all of it necessary?
- What approvals, transparency or recording would be needed?
- Where must a practitioner return to source evidence or the person's own voice?
- What would meaningful human oversight look like at the point of action?

Green / amber / red exercise

Green: potentially useful within current approved arrangements. Amber: possible only with extra checks, context or explicit approval. Red: do not proceed without formal governance, specialist advice or a different approach. Ask the group to explain the reason for each boundary rather than treating the colours as universal rules.

Evidence, standards and further reading

The course is designed to sit alongside - not replace - current employer policy and authoritative guidance. AI practice is evolving quickly, so facilitators should check for updates before delivery.

Social Work England - The emerging use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in social work

Research highlights current use including virtual assistants, transcription, generated case recording and chatbots; it emphasises governance, people at the heart of practice, critical thinking, professional judgement and CPD.

<https://www.socialworkengland.org.uk/about/publications/the-emerging-use-of-artificial-intelligence-ai-in-social-work/>

Social Work England - Professional standards

Particularly relevant: dignity/privacy and confidentiality (2), accountability and professional judgement including bias and ICT (3), CPD (4), professional integrity (5) and ethical practice (6).

<https://www.socialworkengland.org.uk/standards/professional-standards/>

BASW - Statement on Social Work and Generative Artificial Intelligence

A profession-specific starting point on the advantages, disadvantages and conditions needed for safe and appropriate use of generative AI.

<https://basw.co.uk/policy-and-practice/resources/basw-statement-social-work-and-generative-artificial-intelligence>

ICO - Guidance on AI and data protection

Covers accountability, transparency, lawfulness, accuracy, fairness, data minimisation, security, individual rights and meaningful human oversight where personal data is processed.

<https://ico.org.uk/for-organisations/uk-gdpr-guidance-and-resources/artificial-intelligence/guidance-on-ai-and-data-protection/>

GOV.UK - Responsible AI Toolkit / children's social care data analytics guidance

Useful organisational resources on responsible innovation, bias, transparency, governance, scrutiny and accountability.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/responsible-ai-toolkit>

Review note

AI technology, employer policies and regulation are changing quickly. This resource is intentionally scheduled for six-month review. Check the source links above and local policy before using the material in formal training.