

SASW

The professional association for
social work and social workers



A secure future for Scottish social work



www.basw.co.uk/scotland

Introduction



Social work is at the heart of our public services and forms the backbone of our social support and protection systems. With crucial connections to health, social care, education, and justice systems, social work is and must be a profession embedded within Scottish communities. Where social workers are recognised as skilled, autonomous professionals central to upholding human rights and promoting social justice, they have the ability to transform lives.

Social work's foundation in human rights, respect for autonomy, choice, and positive therapeutic relationships is a powerful tool to support people who are struggling with challenging lives. Social workers excel at balancing autonomy, choice, and protection in complex situations where people's individual rights are in conflict.

Social workers train as generalists and can work confidently and effectively across support for adults, children and people in the justice system. This gives them skills that are currently an untapped resource for building community resilience. Freeing social workers to use their expertise to support communities, to lead projects and contribute to local development, could be central to transforming our communities. As a relationship-based profession, social work's strength lies in building meaningful connections with people and communities. This takes time, commitment, personal and organisational resource. Social workers should be trusted, accessible community figures. They should be known in schools, GP surgeries, and community hubs, where they should be able to focus on early support, ensuring that people get help when they need it before situations become crises.

Social workers do life-changing work, such as supporting older adults and people with disabilities to get the help they need. They also protect vulnerable people from harm. They support children with disabilities and their families. Where families are struggling and there is risk, they help them stay

together where that is possible. Social workers provide crucial assessments to the Courts and Parole Board, help people rehabilitate into their communities safely and deliver community sentences that support reintegration. Specially trained social workers (Mental Health Officers) protect the rights of people who need compulsory care because of severe mental ill health. These social workers also protect the rights of vulnerable people who lack capacity over their own affairs.

At the moment, due to the financial constraints in public services, local authorities can only offer support to people who are presenting with very high levels of need. Over the last two decades, there have been many reports about health and social services that all point to the need to develop early intervention and prevention services. Community-based support can help people before their needs become critical, creating more cost-effective and humane care. Social workers are relationship-builders and connectors of supports who work across health, social care, and third sector boundaries to ensure that people receive the support they need.

The Scottish Parliament recently voted to establish the National Social Work Agency to provide foundations for national consistency and effective social work based on research and best practice. This has created a significant opportunity to reshape social services across Scotland, putting the 'social' back into social work.

Action Area 1: Sustainable workforce



Recent workforce figures show that:

- 25% of social workers who graduate leave the profession within 6 years.¹
- 19% of the profession is aged over 55.²
- 82% of the workforce is female.³
- 8-9% total vacancy rate across the public sector profession, with most authorities reporting over this average rate.^{4 5}

Concerted action is needed to create a sustainable social work workforce.

► **Fair national terms & conditions for social workers: SASW's One Deal for Social Work Campaign**

Given the difficulty in recruiting and retaining social workers, the profession must be made more attractive to join and to remain in.

Social work pay and conditions lag behind many other public services. This becomes particularly clear when local authority employees work side by side with better-paid NHS colleagues in integration settings. We effectively have a two-tier workforce, with significantly better terms and conditions for NHS employees.

Most social workers are employed by local authorities. In the collective bargaining process for pay and conditions, the social work role is part of the main local government job family, together with other vital, but quite different, local authority workers. Whilst local authority pay rises are agreed nationally, pay rates and scales are determined locally. This means that the social workers in one local authority area may be paid significantly more or less than their colleagues in neighbouring authorities. This creates a constant merry-go-round of people leaving lower-paying employers for those paying more. The human and financial costs of recruitment for employers, the impact of multiple social workers on people and their families, and the effect of vacancies on those who remain in local teams can be brutal. Other comparable professions, such as teachers, have separate and nationally agreed-upon pay and conditions.

Our report with the Social Workers Union (SWU) highlights the need for employers to embrace flexible working to tackle workforce issues. This is particularly important as the evidence strongly suggests the demographics of the social work workforce are amongst the most likely to benefit from flexible working.⁶

¹ [Setting the Bar: towards an indicative maximum caseload for Scotland's public sector social workers - Social Work Scotland](#)

² [Setting the Bar: towards an indicative maximum caseload for Scotland's public sector social workers - Social Work Scotland](#)

³ [Interactive Social Worker Data Tool 2022 | Scottish Social Services Workforce Data](#)

⁴ [New six-monthly social worker report](#) (the latest report from July 2025 has missing data but showed only a slight drop from the figure used.)

⁵ [Six-monthly social worker report published](#)

⁶ [Flexible working: The business case](#)

► Parity with other public sector professions

The pay gap between social work and other professions has widened over the last decade. For example, teachers in Scotland are another nationally recognised but local authority employed profession. They perform an equally important and dedicated role, which has had better recognition in terms of pay and conditions over the last decade. The table below shows the national maingrade teacher salary scale and the scale on which social workers are recruited in Edinburgh (Band 7 SCP 58).

2014 rates of pay:

Maingrade teacher starting salary 2014 ⁷	Band 7 City of Edinburgh 2014 starting salary (social worker)
£26,235	£27,651 ⁸

2024 rates of pay:

Maingrade teacher starting salary 2024	Band 7 City of Edinburgh 2024 starting salary (social worker)
£40,305	£37,626 ⁹
Maximum pay rate	Maximum pay rate
£50,589	£44,257

This represents an increase in pay of over 53% over the last decade for teachers in Scotland compared to an increase of 36% over the same period for social workers. In addition, the top of the maingrade teacher payscale is £50,589 where the maximum for social workers in this local authority comparison is just £44,257. This leaves a gap of £6,332 or 14% between the two maximum salaries in this example.

According to the website thesalarycalculator.co.uk the maximum salaries in this illustration could give a take-home difference of £265.43 a month (as of Feb 2025).

Due to the different levels of pay across local authorities, some social workers' salaries start above £40,000, but few social workers will ever be paid as much as teachers at the top of their respective salary bands.

⁷ [Salary scales 2015 poster.pdf](#)

⁸ [Chan Annual pay rates from 01 April 14 information EDIR3124.pdf](#)

⁹ [Pay structure and pay guides – The City of Edinburgh Council](#)



► Mileage

Many social workers are required to use their own vehicles to travel on business, yet the mileage rate remains unchanged since 2011. Inflation has reduced the real value of this payment significantly. Mileage payments are not just for fuel but to cover wear and tear, to make the cost of travelling for work manageable. If the 45p a mile allowance were being set today, it would only be worth around 30p.¹⁰

There is a discrepancy in mileage rates between NHS workers who, rightly, now receive 61p a mile and Local Authority workers who can usually claim only 45p. This adds to the seemingly two-tier nature of the integrated health and social care workforce in Scotland, as these colleagues often work side-by-side.

ASKS:

The next Scottish Government must:

- 1.1** End the huge disparity in pay between social workers and their colleagues in other professions by implementing fair national terms and conditions, as outlined in our One Deal for Social Work campaign.¹¹ This must include a provision to improve access to flexible working. Many of SASW's asks are supported by unions.¹²
- 1.2** Create a working environment in which a range of improvements to terms and conditions (such as maximum caseloads, flexible working, and paid overtime) are available.
- 1.3** Fund a mileage allowance of at least 60p a mile for local authority workers in social services and ensure this is a requirement of any services commissioned by local authorities.

¹⁰ [Inflation calculator | Bank of England](#)

¹¹ [Petition - One Deal for Social Work: Campaign for Fair National Conditions for Social Workers - United Kingdom - Change.org](#)

¹² [Flexible working in Scottish social work.pdf](#)

Action Area 2: Thriving communities



► Minimum income guarantee

In the last 15 years, we have seen little improvement in poverty in Scotland. The Scottish Government is exploring [a minimum income guarantee \(MIG\)](#). The MIG is more than simply a social security proposal, it is:

- A guaranteed level of income beneath which no individual living in Scotland would fall.
- A minimum income set to ensure an acceptable standard of living that promotes dignity and a decent quality of life.
- Designed to recognise our distinct needs, which vary by person and family.
- Focused on tackling poverty, inequality and financial insecurity.
- Accessible to all of us with a clear focus on reducing inequalities.

The MIG represents a universal guarantee but would primarily benefit households living on the lowest incomes. It is tailored to individual household circumstances, such as disability, number of children, and household income.¹³

To tackle poverty, child poverty and deprivation across society, we need radical action. Scottish Social Security changes like the Scottish Child Payment (SCP) have shown that specific interventions that deliver cash in pockets can make a dramatic difference to poverty. The SCP, according to the Scottish Government itself, is improving the lives of hundreds of thousands of children in Scotland. The MIG has similar potential to provide financial security for all.^{14 15}

► Local Government funding

Local authorities derive funding from the Scottish government as well as through local taxation and other income-generating measures to pay for services. The level of funding each local authority achieves directly affects how much it can spend. Every year, the Scottish Government decides how much local authorities will get from the national pot. Year on year, local authorities have to balance the growing demand for their services with budgets that have decreased in real terms.^{16 17} This uncertainty over budgets makes long-term planning and strategic decision-making difficult.¹⁸ Many services are commissioned on an annual basis with little security and very low wages for their workers, resulting in anxiety for those who work in these services and people who need support. As a result, many smaller organisations are just surviving on insecure funding streams, which are constantly at risk of being cut. The Scottish Government supplements local government funding by offering small cash funds for specific projects. Local authorities and the third sector have to apply for and manage these various grants. They are often also required to report how this funding is used, which risks wasting money and resource on excessive administration.

¹³ [Minimum Income Guarantee Expert Group: interim report - gov.scot](#)

¹⁴ [4. Results - Child poverty cumulative impact assessment: update - gov.scot](#)

¹⁵ [Meeting the moment: Scottish Election 2026 | Joseph Rowntree Foundation](#)

¹⁶ [Local Government Finance: facts and figures 2024 | Scottish Parliament](#)

¹⁷ [Briefing: Local government budgets 2024/25](#)

¹⁸ [Call for long-term funding deal for councils after Covid - BBC News](#)



The funding of local authorities should be seen more broadly as the funding of local public services. SASW supports many of the recommendations of the Local Government Information Unit's (LGIU) [2024 report on local government finances](#).

We back previous calls from the Accounts Commission, LGIU and others for transparent and sustainable multi-year funding deals for local authorities.^{19 20 21}

► **Specific recognition, funding, and support for rural and island services**

Support services in the central belt cannot be designed or delivered in exactly the same way as those on, for example, Shetland. It usually costs more to run services in rural and island communities because of the environment, distances between services, and it may be more expensive to recruit and retain the workforce. It can also be difficult to commission services in rural and island communities because the infrastructure (such as public transport) that supports similar urban areas does not exist. Over the years, the move toward centres of excellence and centralised services has further eroded the sustainability of rural and island services.

¹⁹ [Integration Joint Boards finances continue to be precarious | Audit Scotland](#)

²⁰ [2024 State of local government finance in Scotland](#)

²¹ [Briefing: Local government budgets 2024/25](#)

Supporting community groups and third sector organisations dedicated to providing services in rural and island areas, and improving and maintaining infrastructure, would improve service provision in these locations. Equally, the employment terms and conditions that apply to those services, such as the rate paid for travel expenses, should be equivalent to those in the public sector. This is necessary to achieve the 'ethical commissioning' demanded by the Care Reform Act in all areas, but particularly in rural and island communities where service delivery faces additional challenges.²²

Some providers of services commissioned by local authorities do not pay workers for the time they spend travelling between supported people's addresses. This unfair and immoral practice affects all workers who experience it but is particularly problematic in rural areas where travel time can be much longer. This means that workers in rural areas face extended periods of unpaid time, not only while travelling but also during scheduled gaps between visits when the distance between appointments makes it impractical to return to base. Not only is this practice immoral and unjustifiable, but it is also likely to drive recruitment issues in the social care sector and affect the ability of services to meet the needs of people who need support.

In rural and island communities that have a limited number of available staff, social workers work flexibly across traditional specialisms. This means taking a community or generalist approach rather than the traditional service specialisms of children and families, adults, and justice services. Where this multi-skilled approach is recognised and well supported, it provides a challenging and varied social work experience. This can make the role more enjoyable, promote the visibility of social work in communities, enhance local relationships and provide a real sense of pride in local support services. However, where this is not well supported, it can add to poor decision-making, burnout, and a feeling of being overwhelmed and underappreciated.

Being well-known in the communities in which you are working as a professional can create problems as well as bring benefits. SASW is aware of social workers being stalked and harassed in their communities, receiving death threats and feeling unable to attend community social events. Employers and the police must recognise the real risks and harm this can cause. Local leaders must be clear that such behaviour is not acceptable and will not be tolerated. Where these circumstances arise, there must be clear plans to protect and support social workers.

► **Supporting refugees: Mitigation of no recourse to public funds**

A person has no recourse to public funds (NRPF) when they are 'subject to immigration control,' which is a responsibility retained by the UK Government. This means they cannot claim public funds such as benefits and housing support, unless an exception applies, such as when a family has children that are at risk of significant hardship. People designated NRPF are at significant risk of destitution and exploitation. Scottish Councils and their social workers often go to enormous lengths to exercise the moral duty to protect these vulnerable people from predation, exploitation and the effects of destitution. The impact of not being able to work or being entitled to support can be particularly detrimental to women, placing them at risk of gender-based violence.²³ SASW calls on the next Scottish Government to fully implement the *Ending Destitution Together Strategy*, to provide clearer routes to support for people who are locked out of the system and prevented from supporting themselves.

²² [Care Reform \(Scotland\) Bill | Scottish Parliament Website](#)

²³ [Influential women urge Labour to include asylum seekers in plan to tackle violence | Violence against women and girls | The Guardian](#)



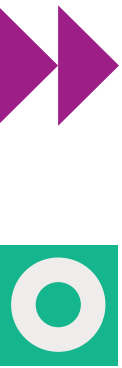
ASKS:

The next Scottish Government must:

- 2.1** Ensure that all services commissioned from public funds pay workers for travel time at the contracted hourly rate.
- 2.2** Make it easier for small local organisations to bid for commissions.
- 2.3** Work with the National Social Work Agency and partners to ensure generalist social workers in rural and island locations are properly supported.
- 2.4** Simplify funding by implementing multi-year budgets for local authorities and ending fragmented ring-fenced pots.
- 2.5** Rapidly implement the Minimum Income Guarantee.²⁴
- 2.6** Cover the expenses in local authority budgets so that Scotland can fulfil our moral duty to refugees.

²⁴ [Minimum Income Guarantee: report - a roadmap to dignity for all - gov.scot](https://www.gov.scot/publications/minimum-income-guarantee-report/pages/11.aspx)

Action Area 3: Social work and the Scottish Government



► Parity of esteem, resourcing and policy priority

The Independent Review of Adult Social Care (2021) noted a need for greater parity between social services and health care. We have not seen any progression towards this goal, which will not be realised without changes in policy and funding priorities by our national government.^{25 26}

The integration of health and social services through the Integration Joint Boards and Health and Social Care Partnerships across Scotland has thrown up challenges to cohesive working, such as the differences in pay, opportunities for development, career enhancement, professional respect and understanding and even mileage payments between workers employed by local authorities and those employed by the NHS.

► The impact of the multi-portfolio approach to social work within Government

Four cabinet secretaries and many more ministerial posts within the Scottish Government hold elements of social work within their portfolios. The spread across policymaking silos means that social work is never viewed or planned for in its professional entirety. Ministers are rightly keen to have an impact on their areas of responsibility, but the social work sector is regularly and frequently overwhelmed by demands for input to policy development and under-resourced to effectively implement enacted policy.

► Establishment of a national social work agency

The creation of the National Social Work Agency by the passing of the Care Reform (Scotland) Act 2025 provides the foundation for much of the work needed to create an environment where social work and social care are valued by our society and seen as equally important to wellbeing as good health care. The Agency will collaborate with key partners to address the profession's workforce issues and promote quality social work across Scotland.

ASKS:

The next Scottish Government must:

- 3.1** Ensure that, where integration of health and social services happens, workers feel valued and suitably remunerated.
- 3.2** Recognise the multiportfolio nature of social work and take specific actions to ensure joined-up policy creation.

²⁵ [Independent Review of Adult Care in Scotland](#)

²⁶ [Adult social care: independent review - gov.scot](#)

ALL ASKS:

The next Scottish Government must:

► Action Area 1

- 1.1** Implement fair national terms and conditions as outlined in our One Deal for Social Work campaign to end the huge disparity in pay between social workers and their colleagues in other professions. This must include a provision to improve access to flexible working. Many of SASW's asks are supported by unions.²⁸
- 1.2** Create a working environment in which a range of improvements to terms and conditions (such as maximum caseloads, flexible working, and paid overtime) are available.
- 1.3** Fund a 60p a mile minimum mileage allowance for local authority workers in social services and ensure this is a requirement of any services commissioned by local authorities.

► Action Area 2

- 2.1** Ensure that all services commissioned from public funds pay workers for travel time at the contracted hourly rate.
- 2.2** Make it easier for small local organisations to bid for commissions.
- 2.3** Work with the National Social Work Agency and partners to ensure generalist social workers in rural and island locations are properly supported.
- 2.4** Simplify funding by implementing multi year budgets for local authorities, and ending fragmented ring-fenced pots.
- 2.5** Rapidly implement the Minimum Income Guarantee.²⁹
- 2.6** Cover the expenses in local authority budgets so that Scotland can fulfil our moral duty to refugees.

► Action Area 3

- 3.1** Ensure that, where integration of health and social services happens, workers feel valued and suitably remunerated.
- 3.2** Recognise the multiportfolio nature of social work and take specific actions to ensure joined-up policy creation.

²⁷ [Petition · One Deal for Social Work: Campaign for Fair National Conditions for Social Workers - United Kingdom · Change.org](#)

²⁸ [Flexible working in Scottish social work.pdf](#)

²⁹ [Minimum Income Guarantee: report - a roadmap to dignity for all - gov.scot](#)



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