

Briefing for MPs: Second Reading of the Children's Wellbeing Bill

Introduction The British Association of Social Workers (BASW) England is the professional association for social workers, representing just under 22,000 members. We advocate for the highest professional standards, better working conditions, and justice for those served by social work.

Social workers play a critical role in children's social care, safeguarding vulnerable children, supporting families, and promoting children's welfare within complex and often challenging circumstances.

This briefing sets out key points for MPs to consider ahead of the second reading of the Children's Wellbeing Bill based on feedback from our members.

Top lines:

- 1. Family group decision-making must complement state support**
- 2. Clearer roles and evidence are needed for safeguarding reforms**
- 3. Care leavers and kinship families need stronger, longer-term support**

Family group decision-making

Proposal: Mandate local authorities to offer family group decision-making meetings at the pre-proceedings stage to reduce care proceedings.

BASW Position:

- While family group conferences are widely used and beneficial, they must not replace properly funded state intervention.
- Nearly 1 in 3 children live in poverty, requiring sustained state support to complement family efforts.
- Family-based approaches must be supported by well-funded services to ensure safe and appropriate outcomes for children.

Recommendations:

- Ensure family group decision-making complements, not substitutes, adequately resourced local authority interventions.
- Provide additional funding to support family-led care plans alongside professional interventions.

Child protection and safeguarding

Strengthening education's Role: BASW supports improved multi-agency safeguarding arrangements but seeks clarity on education's specific role.

Multi-agency child protection teams: While these teams may improve some outcomes, concerns exist over potential fragmentation of services resulting in disjointed journeys for children and

families as they move between services depending on changes in their circumstance. Evaluation of the pilots is not complete, and evidence is not currently conclusive on the effectiveness of this model.

BASW Position:

- Social work expertise in holistic child and family safeguarding must remain central.
- Families need consistent, relational support from skilled practitioners to prevent retraumatisation through repeated storytelling.
- Training for Family Help workers must be robust to ensure they can identify and escalate cases requiring formal child protection measures.

Recommendations:

- Conduct a comprehensive evaluation of multi-agency models before widespread implementation.
- Provide clear guidance on team roles and training, ensuring effective collaboration without compromising social work's unique expertise.

Support for children in care and care leavers

Key Proposals:

- Staying Close support for care leavers up to age 25.
- Local authorities publish support plans that address housing and prevent homelessness.

BASW Concerns:

- Current regulations for semi-independent accommodation fail to ensure safe, suitable environments for care leavers.
- Kinship care funding improvements are welcome but overlook specific cultural and community needs.

Recommendations:

- If a child is looked after by the state, they should receive care where they live – up to at least 18 years.
- Develop inclusive kinship care policies reflecting diverse family structures and cultural practices.
- Mandate specialist kinship teams within local authorities for consistent support.
- Extend support for kinship families beyond children reaching age 18 to prevent abrupt cessation of resources.

Accommodation

Regional Care Co-operatives (RCCs): Proposals aim to improve planning and commissioning but risk adding bureaucracy without resolving underlying issues like workforce shortages.

BASW position:

- RCCs could disrupt vital relationships between social workers, children, and foster carers.
- Overspending on care budgets for years indicates RCCs may reduce, rather than enhance, resources.

Recommendations:

- Commission an independent cost-benefit analysis of RCC proposals before proceeding.
- Prioritise workforce investment to ensure experienced social workers can provide high-quality support.

Profit Cap for Providers: BASW supports measures to curb profiteering but calls for transparency in implementation.

Information sharing and identifiers

Proposal: Establishes a legal basis for data sharing and a consistent identifier for children and families.

BASW Feedback:

- Mixed views among members, with concerns over human rights, costs, and potential inefficiencies.
- Improved resourcing for existing practices could enhance outcomes without requiring new systems.

Recommendation:

- Carefully design data-sharing measures to protect human rights and ensure cost-effectiveness.
- Prioritise resourcing frontline services to address systemic barriers to effective practice.

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Please get in touch if you would like any further information or would like to set up a meeting with one of the team at BASW England.