

BASW England's position on the Crime and Policing Bill

Overview

This briefing sets out the British Association of Social Workers (BASW) England's position on the Government's proposals to introduce a mandatory duty to report child sexual abuse (CSA), as included in the Crime and Policing Bill. Representing over 22,000 social workers in England, BASW supports efforts to strengthen safeguarding but urges a cautious, evidence-based approach to implementation. The Association is concerned that aspects of the current proposals risk undermining child protection and the effectiveness of social work practice.

Key Messages

- **Support for safeguarding goals:** BASW England shares the Government's commitment to improving the identification and prevention of CSA and supports measures that will enhance the protection of vulnerable children.
 - **Need for a balanced approach:** Introducing a mandatory duty to report must avoid unintended consequences that may overburden services and weaken professional safeguarding systems which protect children.
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Critical concerns and recommendations

1. Clarity, training, and consistency

- *Concern:* Without clear definitions of "known" vs. "suspected" abuse, and what is included in 'made aware', professionals risk uncertainty and inconsistency in reporting.
- *Recommendation:* Introduce **comprehensive training** and publish **detailed guidance** to support professionals in identifying and responding to abuse appropriately.

2. Overloading services and systemic risk

- *Concern:* Clause 52, which introduces criminal penalties for obstructing reports, may lead to excessive, fear-driven inappropriate referrals.
- *Risk:* This could overwhelm child protection services, reduce capacity for early help and family support.
- *Recommendation:* Rework the clause to include **clear thresholds**, protect decision-making roles, and **fund services** adequately to handle increased demand.

3. Workforce pressures and service sustainability

- *Concern:* Social workers are already facing unsustainable workloads, high vacancy rates, and resource constraints.
- *Recommendation:* Any changes must be matched by **investment in staffing, retention, and wellbeing** to ensure frontline services can deliver safe and effective support. Equally supervision and support must be available for practitioners at all times concerning these matters.

4. Risk of discrimination in implementation

- *Concern:* Sanctions under mandatory reporting may disproportionately impact Black, disabled, and other marginalised groups due to unconscious bias.
- *Recommendation:* Ensure **robust equality impact assessments**, anti-discrimination training, and oversight mechanisms to promote fairness and avoid systemic bias. Such training to include non-verbal ways of showing distress via their presentation, behaviour, and responses seen in many disabled children.

Support for targeted measures

- BASW England welcomes the Bill's proposals to tackle "**cuckooing**" and broader forms of child exploitation, acknowledging the importance of a multi-agency response.

Conclusion and next steps

BASW England is committed to constructive engagement with the Government to refine the duty to report in a way that strengthens safeguarding without compromising the welfare of children or undermining the capacity of services. We are calling for:

- A meeting with Ministers and officials to discuss our concerns.
- Ongoing consultation with frontline professionals.
- Legislative amendments that ensure safeguards are effective, equitable, and sustainable.

Contact

For further information or to arrange a meeting, please contact:

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