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Three pages of responses from UK political parties to BASW's Manifesto for Social Work



BASW's Manifesto for Social Work

The eight party submissions that you will read in this section are largely centred on responses to BASW's Manifesto for Social Work, outlined below. Please note that devolution means that responsibility for social work and wider policies often does not reside with the MPs elected at the 6 May General Election, and this clearly affects the nature of the comments submitted.

The six core principles:

1. Support for the profession of social work.
2. The fair and equitable distribution of resources
3. Fair access to public services
4. Recognition of the rights and duties of individuals, families, groups and communities
5. Equal treatment and protection under the law
6. Social development and environmental management in the interests of present and future human welfare.

Five points and a practical offer

A Social Work Act of Parliament

New legislation and amendments to statutory guidance to ensure a College of Social Work has a fundamental role in setting standards for entry to the profession, standards required of employers, the career structure of social workers, qualifications and continuing professional development.

Protection of Social Work Services

Inclusion of social work amongst those services – education, health and police – deemed as priorities for protection from cuts. Support for BASW's statement on the role of social workers in Adult and Children's services.

Fair Access to services and dignity in old age

A funding system for the care of older people which recognises that all forms of care should have the same status as the NHS and are funded either through National Insurance or general taxation

Equal treatment and protection under the law

1. Amendment of the law on hospital discharges to allow social workers to delay discharges for one week if the discharge arrangements are unsafe.
2. Amendments to legislation to give children equal protection from assault – as we afford to adults – and remove such concepts as 'reasonable punishment' and 'justifiable assault'.

Social work is a fundamental tool of international development

A commitment to ensuring that social work and the principles of our profession inform all aspects of international development work, building links between the Department for International Development and the International Federation of Social Workers and ensuring that excellent social work practice supports communities afflicted by famine, poverty, war, natural disaster and climate change.

'MPs into social work' scheme

A practical offer to MPs to learn about social work and pick up some skills for constituency work through secondment to a social work programme.

The parties invited to respond to the Manifesto for Social Work across the three following pages are those represented in the House of Commons up until the General Election on 6 May 2010. Unfortunately, although all of these parties were invited to provide a response, the Ulster Unionist Party decided not to respond, citing the fact that health and social services are matters devolved to Northern Ireland.





The Labour Party response



We don't think Professional Social Work readers need to be told how important your job is to the community – but you do need to be told how much we appreciate it. Politicians aren't famed for saying thank-you, but we do want to share, on behalf of the whole country, our most sincere appreciation for the work you do to bring hope to those with the greatest of needs. And it is because we value your work so highly, that Labour is committed to giving you the support you need.

In December 2009, Ed Balls and Andy Burnham announced the government's acceptance of the recommendations from the final Social Work Taskforce report.

The package they announced included:

- A new and independent College for Social Work, led and owned by the profession
- Reforms to initial training, so all students receive good quality education and practice placements
- A new 'licensing' system which will introduce an assessed probationary year in employment for new social work graduates, during which they will receive extra support

- A revamped framework for continuing professional development, underpinned by a practice-based masters qualification
- A career structure so experienced practitioners can progress in front line roles
- A new standard for employers that includes high quality supervision, time for continuing professional development and manageable work loads
- Pay reform – unions will work with local government employers to ensure social workers receive the appropriate pay for their work and progression.

Earlier in 2009 the Taskforce proposed reforms to the Integrated Children's System which the government accepted and which are now being implemented by local authorities. These should significantly reduce the bureaucracy children's social workers experience on the front line.

In March, Ed Balls announced more than £200 million to support social work improvement in adult and children's services in 2010 - 11, alongside a new Local Social Work Improvement Fund of £23 million to help re-

duce pressure on children's social workers and a grant of £15 million to improve local IT systems. At a time when we are asking social workers to do more, it is only fair that we support them more too.

We know that you went in to the profession to make a difference, and that many of you were inspired by the values of compassion and solidarity which are embodied in the NHS. Labour believes that the time has come to mirror our National Health Service with a National Care Service, and we will need the support of social workers to implement this revolution in the care given to older and disabled people. We have set out details in our recent white paper.

You are already inspiring the next generation of social workers, and we are delighted that a recent recruitment campaign has already led to more than 50,000 people expressing their interest in entering the profession.

This is hugely encouraging and points towards the bright future for social work which Labour is determined to work with you to bring about.

The Plaid Cymru response

Plaid Cymru is pleased to have the opportunity to comment on this Manifesto for Social Work. Social workers play a vital role in communities in Wales, and it is important that the sector continues to be supported and sustained.

Plaid Cymru welcomes in principle BASW's pledge to campaign for new laws to ensure that a College of Social Work sets fundamental standards for entry into the profession, for career structures and professional development. Plaid Cymru hopes that this will be mirrored in Wales, where education and social care are devolved to the National Assembly.

Plaid Cymru supports the MPs into Social Work scheme, designed to give parliamentarians a clear, practical insight into the work – and the world – of social workers, and the day-to-day structure of their work. As a party, we would hope that this pledge is extended to Assembly Members, too. Plaid Cymru would like to reiterate BASW's pledge that social work is a tool of international development. Plaid Cymru also believes that it is vitally important that the retention of social workers is prioritised, that more people are encouraged to enter the social work profession, and that



frontline services for the vulnerable and those in need are sustained to provide support for social workers in our communities.

Plaid Cymru advocates the establishment of a national pay structure for social workers, and supports BASW's Patrons and Ambassador scheme, launched last year at the Senedd by Plaid Cymru AM and BASW Patron Bethan Jenkins, in order to raise the

profile of social workers in Wales, and to assist in encouraging positive images of social workers in the media.

Plaid Cymru would like to see a full review of CAF/CASS in Wales to ensure that all citizens who access its services are fairly represented, and treated equally. On family law, we would like to see BASW look into the concept of supporting shared parenting, and for BASW to support the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child in any policy development or legislation here in Wales. Plaid Cymru regards the six core principles laid out by BASW as central to achieving its aims, supporting social workers and bringing wider public recognition of the role that the sector delivers to society in Wales and across the rest of the UK.





The Scottish Nationalist Party response

As you will know the SNP doesn't vote on legislation that does not either apply to or impact on Scotland – so reforms which relate solely to England would not be a matter for SNP MPs. However, we are aware of concerns, for example, around the proposal to create a College of Social Work and that this may be viewed as a UK-wide proposal. If that were to be the case, SNP MPs would certainly be involved and would take a strong interest in ensuring that the views of the social work profession and social work services in Scotland were taken fully into account.

Scotland's system of social work

training and professional development is seen as one of the best and we would be incredibly concerned should any pan-UK measures propose anything that would lower standards in Scotland,

or fail to fully represent and acknowledge the separate legal and political system in Scotland, or to ensure that the Scottish

profession at all levels was fully represented. Similarly any issues around recognition of qualifications between England and Scotland and around the exchange of information where appropriate would be of concern to SNP MPs.

SNP
www.snp.org

The Sinn Féin response



We accept that public finances are not infinite, that is why Sinn Féin have championed the use of equality impact assessments as the basis for budgetary and resource decision making.

We have consistently said there should be no cuts to frontline services. Social workers are at the frontline,

often doing a very difficult job in often very difficult and delicate circumstances.

Sinn Féin fully recognises the role that social workers play in our communities in supporting vulnerable people in their everyday lives.

Social workers need to be supported in carrying out their role and we should ensure that up-to-date systems, practices and legislation are in place to enable them to do this.

Our party will work with the Northern Ireland Association of Social Workers (part of BASW) to champion the rights of social workers and to meet the needs as identified in this manifesto.

The Conservative Party response



The Conservatives are deeply concerned about the growing pressures on social workers and the poor perception of the profession. That is why we set up a Commission on the Future of Social Workers, chaired by shadow children's minister Tim Loughton, which published the well-received *No More Blame Game* report in 2007 and a study in 2009 in response to the Laming inquiry.

In recent years, social workers have increasingly become strangled by a tidal wave of bureaucracy and regulation to the extent that many frontline professionals now spend 80% of their time on form-filling and deskwork. We need to cut through this and give social workers the opportunity to spend more time where they are needed and where they want to be: working directly with vulnerable families and children.

This is why in February – at an event to mark the tenth anniversary of Victoria Climbié's death – we published our policy document, *Child*

Protection: Back to the Frontline, in which we announced that Professor Eileen Munro of the London School of Economics had agreed to review social work bureaucracy under a Conservative government.

In *No More Blame Game* we supported the creation of a high profile National College of Social Workers to give the profession a clearer, more coherent voice. Social workers need to be seen as part of the solution – not caricatured in the media as part of the problem – and an independent college would be one means of promoting this goal. This is of particular urgency now: the incidents surrounding Baby Peter's tragic death have done untold damage to both the confidence of the profession and its standing in the eyes of the public.

Because we believe there needs to be a greater understanding of the way in which social work functions, we are interested in BASW's proposal

to develop an 'MPs into social work' scheme. Similar opportunities already exist for MPs working with business, the police or armed services – so why not social work?

We think there needs to be much better publicity for the great work that the profession does day-in, day-out. That is why we have proposed the creation of a chief social worker – on the same basis as a chief medical officer and modelled on the New Zealand experience – who could act as the public face of social work, liaise with government and promote the excellent work being done on the ground.

It will be incumbent upon the next government to restore public confidence in the profession by ensuring that social workers are given the appropriate training and freedom necessary to produce the world-class service our vulnerable children and families need. Not doing so is a false economy.



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The Liberal Democrat Party response



In responding to BASW's Manifesto for Social Work, we're really pleased to have the chance to praise the efforts and –

often overlooked – successes of social workers up and down Britain. They are on the front line in dealing with some of Britain's most intractable problems and many of its most vulnerable people and they deserve all of our gratitude for the work they do.

Social workers also deserve more recognition for their professionalism and dedication. It's good to see the BASW making more of this point and it's one with which the Liberal Democrats agree. We know that the role of a

social worker is too often not properly understood and the pressures that they face are not always appreciated. That's why we believe government should take a lead in increasing the status and standing of social work.

BASW raises a crucial question about personal care for older people. We believe that the whole question of long-term care has been bedevilled by partisan politics for too long. We badly need a consensus on this issue so that we can find a solution which will last – so we would establish a commission, with cross-party support, to stop care for older people being used as a political football in future.

Child protection is one of the most difficult – and, of course, important – areas for social workers. The problems surrounding cases of child abuse are well-known; responding to allegations of abuse and providing children with the help and support they need involve complex

and difficult decisions. Politicians must make sure the law isn't making that task even more difficult – so Liberal Democrats have supported giving children the same protection from assault as adults for several years.

Finally, I agree that we could do much more to make use of the talents of social workers and to ensure that their experience informs our wider policy. We'd certainly be keen to look at what could be done with respect to linking social work and international development. Also, an 'MPs into social work' scheme sounds like an interesting one, along the lines of similar schemes for other professions.

Social workers do a fantastic job for vulnerable people throughout the country and do not always receive the credit they deserve. Liberal Democrats will do all they can to help them do their jobs as well as possible – and make sure the public know about it.

The Democratic Unionist Party response



Social workers are a vital part of our health service and, like all our public services, could come under increasing pressure during the next parliament. Whilst

responsibility for most of the decisions within healthcare have been devolved to the Northern Ireland Assembly, the overall finances for Northern Ireland are still decided at Westminster.

The DUP is dedicated to ensuring that we achieve the best possible deal for Northern Ireland at Westminster which can protect and enhance our public services, and not cut them when they are needed most.

The DUP is committed to the provision of free personal care for our older population and we recognise that the current funding of care is extremely complex and poorly understood by the public. It must be simplified and made more equitable. We also believe there should be a targeted focus of spending on the first four years of life so that problems in later years might be prevented.

As constituency MPs we all see the vital role which is played in society by our social workers and we can all benefit from greater information about the needs and demands of the sector.

The Social Democratic Labour Party response



The SDLP recognises the significant challenges that face those engaged in social work. We have strong links with the profession of social work and are keenly aware of the day-to-day struggles caused by red tape and heavy caseloads.

The SDLP aims to ensure that social workers are protected from the impact of the current financial crisis and that

they are given the support they need to continue to provide their services at a very high standard.

Hard-working social workers need help with ever increasing workloads, they need support in their decision making, and resources need to be allocated to help social services carry out their vitally important work.

The distribution of resources must be carried out with an acknowledgement of the service provided by social workers and recognition of the valuable contribution that social workers make to all aspects of our society. It is also important to recognise that when social work considerations are ignored, major social problems can develop. This applies on local, national, and international levels. The value of social work cannot be ignored any longer.

