

A Manifesto for Social Work ***DRAFT***

Social workers improve people's lives by helping with social and interpersonal difficulties and promoting human rights and wellbeing. Social workers protect children and adults with support needs from harm. From helping keep a family under pressure together to supporting someone with mental health problems, social work is a varied, demanding, often emotional and very rewarding career.

The Scottish Association of Social Work (SASW) campaigns to deliver positive change for the social work profession, and those who need our services. We call on political parties to commit to address the following priorities in the Scottish Parliamentary Elections 2021:

Priority 1: Human Rights

SASW is proud that Scotland has incorporated the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child into our legislation. Sadly, the rest of Scotland's citizens continue to be inadequately served by the several international human rights treaties to which the UK has long been committed. This can be evidenced in the tens of thousands of people who do not have enough food to live on, who are without homes and who suffer from high levels of physical and mental ill health, including drugs deaths, and suicide. Enshrining additional rights that can be called upon through our legislation would deliver a foundation of security for the most vulnerable, ensuring a welcome shift towards a fairer Scotland.

The "hostile environment" demanded by Westminster in response to immigration has left many who have arrived in Scotland as asylum seekers or migrants without rights to work, to housing or to social security and support. A recognition of basic human rights would help to ensure that no one in Scotland suffers the inhumanity of publicly mandated destitution through "no recourse to public funds".

SASW asks you to:

1. Commit to providing greater human rights protections for all citizens in law.
2. Reject the principle of "no recourse to public funds" and ensure local authorities are funded to address the needs of all vulnerable people whatever their immigration status.

Priority 2: Poverty

The impact of poverty, food insecurity, fuel poverty and digital exclusion on Scotland's families and communities is devastating and has been exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic. The result of a decade of austerity on central and local government expenditure, has both pushed more people into poverty and reduced the available services that might support them.

Poverty directly increases the risk of people needing statutory intervention and social work support when they are struggling with life challenges. Children living in the most deprived areas in the UK are far more likely than those in wealthier areas to be placed on the child protection register or in care away from their family homeⁱ. Poverty has become the wallpaper of social work practice, affecting everything that social workers do - "Too big to tackle and too familiar to notice."ⁱⁱ A commitment to full incorporation of the UNCRC cannot be realised without addressing the impact of poverty on children, and on families.

Our citizens need a secure and reliable basic income so that they are not living on the breadline which forces people to choose between absolute necessities. Scotland needs a future economy centred on national and individual wellbeing.

SASW asks you to:

3. Commit to the policy of a Citizens Basic Income or other means of effective and dignified financial support from the state.
4. Talk to people with lived experience of poverty, to better understand the hardships they face so you can deliver more effective policy at both a national and local level.

Priority 3: Listen to the voices and experiences of social workers

The social work profession is a single profession, very connected to, but separate from, social care. It holds specific duties for welfare and has statutory powers to intervene where necessary. Our governance is spread across local authorities, the independent sector and health and social care partnerships. We work across adults, children's, and justice services and, of course, many of the individuals and families we work with have needs that cut across all these specialisms. It can be challenging to bring these diverse experiences and voices together, to support and influence national policy and legislation. A forum such as a Cross-Party-Group would provide a space to collaboratively address issues and work towards solutions. It would promote understanding of the complexities of the profession, bring together the social work voice and positively raise the profile of the profession.

The status quo is not working for people who use our services, or for social workers in working alongside them. Social services, in most areas, are only provided to people when they have reached crisis. Over the last 25 years, local government cultures have contributed to the experience of our profession of becoming assessors without the power to deliver the services required by their assessment, of acting as gatekeeper to public funds, of being process- rather than relationship-driven and of not always having the autonomy to use our professional judgement to make appropriate resource decisions. The Independent Review of Adult Social Care offers a significant opportunity for redesigning the adult social care system, as does The Promise for Children and Families.

Our Self-Directed Support system provides an example of a powerful yet underutilised and under resourced framework for choice and control for the person using services. It is an excellent starting place and could deliver an expectation if further developed and consistently implemented.

Social Work will play a key role within these developments so must be fully engaged and consulted through forums that enable their perspective to be heard and incorporated.

SASW asks you to:

5. Sponsor a cross-party group on social work at the Scottish Parliament (SASW will offer the secretariat for this group).
6. Involve the social work profession at all levels in all reviews and developments of social services in Scotland.
7. Commit to fully and consistently implementing Scotland's Self-Directed Support (SDS) legislation.

ⁱ <https://www.nuffieldfoundation.org/project/inequalities-in-child-welfare-intervention-rates>

ⁱⁱ <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/cfs.12423>