

The Rt Hon Rishi Sunak MP

Sent by email

Monday, 15 August 2022

Dear Mr Sunak,

Re: Conservative Leadership Contest

Whoever Conservative Party members chose to become their next Leader – and therefore the next Prime Minister – will have many challenges to address. As you have reached the final stage of the Conservative Leadership contest, we are writing to you to highlight our priorities and concerns.

We are the British Association of Social Workers, a professional membership organisation for social workers, and we have over 22,000 members across the UK. Our members work with many of the most vulnerable people in this country. Social workers have responsibilities in relation to mental capacity, care assessment planning and delivery, those with severe mental health problems, the safeguarding of adults and those with a disability, including those with a learning disability. In relation to children, social workers have responsibilities in relation to the safeguarding of children, the care of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, children who are 'looked after', and adoption.

The issues discussed so far during this contest have mainly focused on tax cuts and immigration. We understand that taxation and immigration policies are important, but there are other serious issues that are impacting the daily lives of our members and the people that our members support through their work.

Poverty

Poverty is a major societal problem, and one of the ways in which it impacts on the social work task is child protection. There will always be families who need statutory social work intervention whatever their income level. It is also the case that being a parent can be challenging – but being a parent in poverty is even more challenging. Poverty can add to existing problems such as domestic violence and mental health problems and push vulnerable parents over the edge. If the Government is serious about reducing the number of children coming into care and supporting families to stay together, then Government must take positive action to deliver this. Tackling poverty is one of those positive actions.

Over the past 12 years, there have been multiple changes to welfare benefits that have had a detrimental impact on those on lower incomes. Our members on the frontline have seen this impact. Tax cuts will not help those who are on such low incomes that they do not pay tax in the first instance. In addition to this, there are millions of people in work who are paying tax, yet they are in dire straits and will not be

sufficiently helped by the proposed tax cuts because their income will still not keep up with the basic cost of living. The next Prime Minister should make a commitment to lifting people out of poverty, which will not be achieved by further penalising those on low incomes who are already struggling.

Social work and Children's services

Prevention can reduce costly interventions. This is true of health services, and it is also true of social work support. Reductions to local authority budgets have forced councils into prioritising statutory services, with preventative and early intervention services being cut. We are also aware that some statutory services are being deprioritised, which is leading to soaring demand for later stage crisis services. These cost a fortune in money, misery, and compounded needs in the long term. The next Prime Minister should recognise that prevention services can save money in the long-term, and they can deliver better outcomes for families.

As early intervention services are reduced the burden on statutory services increase. We know that social worker caseloads are growing, as are the complexity of the cases, and we need to ensure that there are enough social workers available to provide the legally required services to all those that need it. There are 6,422 full-time equivalent children and family social worker vacancies in England, according to latest statistics from the Department for Education.

Social Work and Adult Services

The phrase 'Adult Social Care' covers a range of services provided by a range of professionals. Social workers are part of this spectrum of support with specific responsibilities enshrined in law. Our society has an ageing population, across all income groups, and as you well know increasing numbers of frail elderly and disabled people have increasingly complex needs. Sufficient funding is required to avert a developing Adult Social Care crisis, which will affect all but the most wealthy in our society.

There are many competing priorities for any Prime Minister, but some matters are more urgent than others. From the Adult Social Care crisis to the growing number of children in care - these issues cannot wait. People without private funding or sufficient personal resources will find it harder to get on in life, and we believe it is the role of Government to enable people and provide services that will deliver a good quality of life for every person.

Yours sincerely,



Dr Ruth Allen, CEO, BASW

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