

Time to get it right

General Election 2024
Manifesto /
Northern Ireland

BASW
Northern Ireland

The professional association for
social work and social workers



FOREWORD BY BASW CHAIR JULIA ROSS



The next General Election will be an election for change. An opportunity to do things differently and make a real change in people's lives. In the last five years we have had three Prime Ministers and more changes to the

Cabinet that any person could count from memory. We have seen direction changes, new plans, refreshed visions, and bold proclamations which have still left us with growing poverty, a shrinking life expectancy for the most disadvantaged in the country, and uncertainty for social work and the people who we work with. The UK Parliament talks a great deal about social care, reforming housing, helping people get

on in life but we are still left waiting for this to come to fruition.

Whatever the result on election night, the UK Parliament and politics will be invigorated with a fresh mandate and the possibility for a new way of thinking.

This manifesto presents key actions that the next UK Government, of whatever persuasion, can take to improve social work and social care, working conditions for social workers, and the lives of the most disadvantaged in Britain today.

It is **time to get it right**. Social workers and the people we work with cannot wait any longer.



INTRODUCTION

Part of our work at BASW is influencing politicians and decision-makers to create laws and implement policies that improve social work and social care, working conditions for social workers, and the lives of people we support. While we have built relationships with the current Conservative Government, a General Election brings the possibility of a change of ruling party in the UK. BASW does not campaign for political parties, but we do campaign for policies. We have created this manifesto to share with politicians, social workers, and the wider public about what it is that we believe the next UK Parliament and Government should be doing. As the British Association of Social Work, the manifesto focuses on social work issues.

UK-wide issues are a major focus for this manifesto. This is because the General Election is UK-wide. Many social work issues are devolved to the nations and these issues are rightly determined at elections for the Scottish Parliament, the Welsh Senedd and Northern Ireland Assembly. The exception is England, where the UK General Election does directly shape social work issues. However, what can change is the level of funding. If Westminster decides to invest more on (say) social housing, this additional funding washes through (via a mechanism called the Barnett Formula) to the governments in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland for them to spend. The manifesto is therefore divided into four parts to clearly identify the policy areas across the UK, across England and Wales and individually for England, Scotland, and Northern Ireland.

Ahead of the General Election, we will be asking political parties represented in Westminster to adopt our policies as their own. Once the election has taken place, we will continue to use this manifesto as a campaigning document to drive our activity over the coming years as we engage with the next UK Parliament and Government.

BASW will campaign on the issues in this manifesto, but we also encourage BASW members and non-members to campaign in a personal capacity. Contact the candidates in your constituency when they're announced, share our manifesto, use social media to have your voice heard.

Visit the General Election hub on the BASW UK website to find other documents relating to the election including the changes to voter registration, and how to Promote the Vote.
<https://new.basw.co.uk/about-basw/campaigning-and-influencing/2024-uk-general-election>

Policies that affect all four nations of the UK





In the UK: Poverty

Poverty is a longstanding problem in the UK however, over recent years poverty has widened (more people are in poverty) and deepened (poverty is more extreme). The UK deserves better than to be characterised by food banks, evictions and homelessness. Many users of social work services are in poverty and this reality gives social workers direct insight into the problems people face. Poverty is also a driver of many of the problems social workers seek to overcome. The alleviation of poverty would be good for society as a whole - but it would also allow social workers to do their job properly in supporting and empowering people more effectively.

1 **Scrap the two-child limit and benefit cap**

The two child-limit on receiving additional means-tested financial support for the third and any further children was introduced in 2017. There are exceptions such as if conception as a result of rape. This policy is harmful to low-income families, unethical, and is a factor for

why more children are in poverty. The benefit cap sets the overall level of benefits people receive irrespective of how many children a family might have or local housing costs. Scrapping these two policies would be the single biggest alleviator of child poverty levels across the UK.

2 **Continue to uprate benefits in line with inflation**

Inflation increases the cost of living, and if you're on benefits you are likely to have a low, fixed income that might not even cover the necessities. But by failing to uprate benefits in line with inflation, people on benefits fall further behind as costs go up but benefit levels remain the same. The next UK Government should commit to uprating benefits in line with inflation every year.

3 **Invest in family and community services** across the UK that support adults and children and prevent escalation to the level of statutory intervention.



In the UK: Housing

The UK has a major housing crisis, and this has a direct impact on many of the people who use social work services. To truly address the housing crisis and make housing more affordable there needs to be an intense programme of building more social and specialist housing. More social housing will ease housing costs and should reduce the cost of private rentals due to more supply. There also needs to be more specialist housing to suit those with additional needs, such as people with learning disabilities and older people.

The next UK Government must work with the devolved nations to identify need and provide the resources to them to fund:

- 4** A substantial and on-going investment in increasing the amount of good-quality social housing in the UK.
- 5** An on-going investment in good-quality specialist and/or supported housing in the UK.
- 6** Undertake a review of those benefits that fuel the housing crisis.





In the UK: Experts by Experience

The engagement of Experts by Experience in the design, delivery, and review of social work services (often summarised as 'co-production') enables meaningful involvement, ensures inclusivity and enhances accountability. As well as being the ethically right thing to do it makes practical sense too.

BASW connects with many people with lived and living experience of social work services who continue to enrich our work. Greater co-production with experts by experience of social work is one important part of our ongoing commitment to engagement and effective services.

7 Policy and service co-production

People with lived experience of social work services – which includes families at all points of the spectrum of intervention and support – need to be routinely included in the delivery, review and development of services. When the next UK Government develops policy and services, experts by experience should be involved from idea conception to implementation.

8 Involvement payments

Involvement payments are paid to Experts by Experience who undertake co-production work in their own time. Engagement in co-production work can enhance wellbeing and, for those who can, provide a route into paid work. Despite this being an increasing norm in health and social care the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) continues to set onerous restrictions on many benefit claimants around involvement payments. There should be a review of how involvement payments are treated by the DWP.



In the UK: Asylum and Immigration

Aspects of the wider UK immigration and asylum system are increasingly at risk of breaching both international law and conventions on human rights. Human rights are central to social work and are embedded in the BASW Code of Ethics. The support and care of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC) is a key social work responsibility and BASW is active in campaigning for the human rights of UASC.

9 Repeal the 2023 Illegal Migration Act

The Illegal Migration Act 2023 changed the law so that those who arrived in the UK through what the Government determines an 'illegal route', will be unable to stay in the UK and will be detained before deportation. The Act serves no positive purpose, is unworkable, and risks breaching domestic and international law.



10 Scrap the National Age Assessment Board

The Nationality and Borders Act paved the way for the creation of a National Age Assessment Board, a body made up of social workers that sits within the Home Office. This gives the Home Office influence over the age assessment of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and opens up the process to political interference by Governments.

11 Abolish 'scientific methods' of age assessment

The Nationality and Borders Act and the Illegal Migration Act both contain clauses that allow the Home Secretary to bring in measures for age disputed young asylum seekers to undergo MRIs and x-rays to assess their age. These are medical procedures and should not be used for age determination, especially on young people who may not be able to give consent or may feel coerced.

12 Time limits on asylum cases for UASC

It has long been recognised that children and young people need speedy resolution to their needs. For example, in the English care system judges are empowered to project-manage cases so that the majority of legal cases relating

to children are completed within a fixed timescale. Many children's asylum cases take far too long to resolve. This drift and delay causes extreme distress for the children and young people seeking asylum and exacerbates costs for the state. Immigration Tribunal judges should be empowered to project-manage asylum cases to within a defined timescale – just like their peers in the family court system.

13 Review of No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF)

The legislation, policies and practices of NRPF have a profoundly negative impact on the most vulnerable in society. There should be a comprehensive independent review of the model of NRPF in relation to those who are destitute, or who face destitution, with a view to the next UK Government replacing the model with a system that is both adequately funded and resourced and is compliant with the UK's commitments to human rights.



In the UK: Restore foreign aid contribution back to 0.7% and fulfil international obligations

14

The UK's contribution to foreign aid was reduced from 0.7% of GDP to just 0.5%. With the international challenges the world is facing in mind, the next UK Government should restore the 0.7% contribution.

Whilst the post Brexit rhetoric articulated by the government has signified that there would be no diminishing of the UK's international responsibilities and status, the UK's credibility in its international role and status remains largely unachieved. Reduced opportunities, funding and reduction in aid has negated the UK's commitment to global human rights and social justice.

We also urge the next UK Government to strengthen its commitment, its role, capacity, and obligations and financial commitment as regional and global partners in supporting and addressing critical social issues across the world impacting on the lives of people and having a significant impact on the global community.



General Elections and Devolution

Aspects of policy making across the UK have been devolved from the UK Parliament to NORTHERN IRELAND, SCOTLAND and WALES

Devolution has not been standardised across the UK. Westminster retains control over some issues in Wales, such as justice, that Scotland and Northern Ireland both have responsibility for in their own legislature.

A General Election elects Members to the UK Parliament, and for that reason this manifesto focuses only on issues where Westminster has authority. Senedd, Northern Ireland Assembly, and Scottish Parliament elections are the appropriate times to campaign on issues devolved to Wales, Northern Ireland, and Scotland respectively.

The Barnett Formula means that any money spent in England (for example, new money invested in public services) must result in a calculation of an amount to be given to Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland.

To read more about the work of BASW Northern Ireland visit:
<https://new.basw.co.uk/about-basw/social-work-around-uk/basw-northern-ireland>





In Northern Ireland: Barnett Formula

This policy applies to **NORTHERN IRELAND** only

15

Review of Northern Ireland's funding through the Barnett Formula

BASW calls for the introduction of a needs-based approach to funding public services in Northern Ireland to replace the outdated Barnett Formula which has led to under resourcing in the region. Northern Ireland has disproportionate need for service provision, with higher-than-average levels of mental health need and consistently the highest rate of economic inactivity of any UK region. Both of these factors are intrinsically linked to the direct impacts of The Troubles and the associated legacy of intergenerational trauma. The region also requires significant additional investment to fund the transformation of children's social care services advocated by the Independent Review of Children's Social Care and to address the recruitment and retention crisis facing the social work profession across all areas of service provision.



How this Manifesto was produced

BASW is member led and member driven. With around 22,000 members BASW has a range of consultation and governance arrangements in place to gather evidence which then determine member priorities.

Our largest UK-wide consultation with members is our annual social work survey, which also gathers views from the profession more widely.

This Manifesto distilled these priorities into the asks. If you would like more information on the evidence and fuller statements behind the asks do get in touch. You can contact us as at policyadmin@basw.co.uk

A note on the terminology

BASW uses the term 'experts by experience' to describe individuals and groups who whether currently, or in the past, have used social work services. Their experience makes them experts. We also recognise that this term is not immediately understood outside BASW so on occasion in this document we have also used alternative phrasing.

Work with the Social Workers Union (SWU) and other partners

BASW works closely with SWU, including on aligned policy and campaigns. We will continue to work with SWU on issues where both our organisations are supportive. BASW also builds partnerships with other non-social work organisations to develop and campaign on shared goals such as UASC and poverty.

You can visit SWU's website to learn more:

<https://swu-union.org.uk>

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