

Time to get it right

General Election 2024
Manifesto

BASW

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.

This manifesto encompasses a wide range of issues from the treatment of people with learning disabilities to children's social care, from unaccompanied asylum-seeking children to poverty.

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 Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland.

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 rest of the manifesto focuses on issues that are devolved in some way, and do not apply to the whole of the UK. We have indicated in each section which nations the policy applies to.

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 the nations, you can visit their webpages:
<https://new.basw.co.uk/about-basw/social-work-around-uk>





People with disabilities

These policies apply to **ENGLAND**, **WALES** and **SCOTLAND** only

15

Promote the Access to Work scheme more widely and ensure there is enough resourcing sufficient to meet demand

Access to Work is a publicly funded employment support grant scheme that aims to support disabled people start or stay in work. It can provide practical and financial support for people who have a disability or physical or mental health condition. There is not enough understanding by employers on how to apply to the Access to Work scheme, which maintains systemic barriers to people with disabilities. The next UK Government should ensure that the scheme is understood by employers, easy to access, and works for people with disabilities, and that there are sufficient resources to meet demand.

16

Amend funding contributions for the Access to Work scheme

There is currently a funding anomaly where employers are required to contribute more to adjustments for employees if the employee has been working for more than 6 weeks. If an employee applied for the scheme before they were 6 weeks into their role, Access to Work will consider paying 100% of the costs associated with the adjustments. This can lead to resource hoarding and keep up barriers to people accessing reasonable adjustments.





Support for Social Workers

These policies apply to **ENGLAND**, **WALES** and **SCOTLAND** only

Social workers have important legal responsibilities and aim to improve people's lives by helping with social and interpersonal difficulties, promoting human rights and wellbeing. Social workers protect children and adults with support needs from harm. But to be able to do this, social workers also need support in their jobs and wellbeing.

17 Increase the non-taxable mileage rate allowance to 60p a mile

Historically the non-taxable allowance of 45p a mile has been linked to, or used as, the mileage rate employers across the UK use to allow social workers to claim back for using their car for work purposes. This amount has remained unchanged since 2011, despite the cost of fuel rising significantly during this period. It is therefore no longer adequate for covering the travel costs necessary for social workers to carry out their roles effectively. For those travelling long distances in rural areas, the pressure is even more acutely felt. The next UK Government should raise the non-taxable allowance to a fairer rate of 60p per mile. This would encourage employers to increase their approved mileage allowance payment.





Mental Health and Mental Capacity

These policies apply to **ENGLAND** and **WALES** only

18 Mental Health Bill

Social workers play a key role in mental health services. Much of existing mental health legislation is now over 40 years old and urgently needs updating. The current UK Government introduced a Draft Mental Health Bill which was subject to pre-legislative scrutiny by parliamentarians but has not brought forward a final Mental Health Bill to go through parliamentary stages to become law. A new Mental Health Act needs to be implemented, and the next UK Government should do so urgently.

19 Extend the debt breathing space to 180 days

Financial difficulties can cause immense stress, which can then result in more serious mental illness. The debt breathing space scheme was introduced in 2021 and is a free Government-backed scheme which gives individuals up to 60 days to address their debt which causes them stress. There is also a mental health breathing space which lasts as long as treatment plus 30 days. Due to the rising cost of living and widespread poverty, the next UK Government should extend the debt breathing space to 180 days, and the mental health breathing space to 180 days after treatment ends.



20 Address the uncertainty around Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards (DoLS)

There are important legal protections in place for people who may have issues around mental capacity. Social workers are key in delivering these. In April 2023, the UK Government announced that they would delay the introduction of Liberty Protection Safeguards (LPS) beyond the life of this Parliament. The LPS were designed to be a replacement of DoLS. Implementation of LPS needs to occur urgently. In the meantime, as the sector will be continuing to use DoLS for the immediate future, the next UK Government should listen to the sector and make improvements to the current scheme, based on the changes that would have been introduced with the LPS.

21 Publish the revised Mental Capacity Act (MCA) Code of Practice

The delay to the LPS has caused further uncertainty about the MCA Code of Practice, and the next UK Government should publish the revised Code of Practice as soon as reasonably possible.



Children in the justice system

This policy applies to **ENGLAND** and **WALES** only



22 **End the use of pain inducing restraint**

There has been an increase in the use of force against children in Young Offenders Institutions. One of the methods used is the inverted wrist hold, which is viewed as pain-inducing and should be subject to more controls. The next UK Government should seek to end the use of pain inducing restraint, such as the inverted wrist hold.



Alcohol and Drugs

This policy applies to **ENGLAND** only



Alcohol and other drugs are used widely at all levels of UK society. Problematic use of alcohol and other drugs is often a result of traumatic life experiences. It impacts on multiple areas of individual, family and community life: employment, housing, domestic violence, mental and physical health.

- 23** To adopt and action comprehensive strategies on Alcohol and other drugs (AoD) based on the social model and to develop the role of social workers within this including an enhanced general training and consideration of an AoD specialist social worker training and accreditation.



Adult Social Care

These policies apply to **ENGLAND** only

24 Social work as a key part of social care

A commitment to providing a long-term sustainable funding solution for social care that will enable planning and delivery of good quality care and services. This must include social workers who have the knowledge, skills and experience to contribute to joined up thinking and system planning in the development of social care services, and the way they are designed and delivered.



25 Review of the Care and Support Statutory Guidance

There should be a review of the Care and Support Statutory Guidance to include how social workers must act in upholding people's rights in circumstances of financial constraint. The Statutory guidance provides the framework for the application of the Care Act, and there are increasing concerns about its application, as evidenced in the reduction in spending on providing care alongside rising demand and transparency in decision-making by public bodies in the determination of resources within the care-planning process. Social work is enshrined in Statutory Guidance and is important for people who are eligible to receive social care services. The role of social work professional judgment provides an important check and balance in the system and needs to be strengthened in order to do this effectively.



Children and Families

These policies apply to **ENGLAND** only



26

Keep caring until 18

In 2021, the Department for Education announced that it would ban the use of unregulated accommodation for children in care who were 15 years old or younger. Children at any age should not be expected to be in independent or semi-independent accommodation – they should be cared for properly. We support Article 39's campaign to make it law that every looked after child receives care until at least their 18th birthday. All forms of accommodation for looked after children must be regulated and inspected to the same high standards. The regulation of supported accommodation for looked after children must include a guarantee of care. One way forward is for these settings to be made to follow the children's homes regulations and quality standards, which already apply to children up to age 18 and beyond.

27 Funding for children's social care

The Independent Review of Children's Social Care set out that £2.6 billion of funding was needed for children's social care in England. We believe this must be matched with consideration also made to any funding lost because of cuts to local authority children's services during the years of austerity. In addition to this, the next UK Government must ensure the adequate funding of foster and residential care, kinship care and wider care services to move away from an overreliance on expensive private care services.

28 Care experience

The next UK Government should make 'care experienced' a protected characteristic under the Equality Act. Making care experience a protected characteristic would give it the same protection under the Equality Act as age, disability, race, religion, gender reassignment, sex, sexual orientation, pregnancy and maternity and marriage and civil partnerships. A change in law would mean public bodies, including councils, the NHS and the police, would have to consider how their policies and practices affect care experienced people. They would have to show what steps they have taken to remove disadvantage and decision-makers would be required to consider the needs of care experienced people in policies.

29 Continuity of care and support

The next UK Government should support the sector to ensure that distressed and traumatised children and families in need of continuity and skilled services are not further stressed by changes of social worker or non-social worker practitioners' lacking the necessary training and skills. The Department for Education proposed to remove the requirement for social workers to carry out child in need assessment, and we have opposed this. Transferring child in need cases to non-social workers may undermine the quality of practice and increase risks to children.



Homes not Hospitals

These policies apply to **ENGLAND** only



30 **Named social worker**

Too many people with a learning disability and autistic people have been subject to an abuse of their human rights in state funded health or care settings and this must stop. People with learning disabilities and autistic people at risk of admission to mental health hospital or currently in hospital must have a named social worker involved so that they can build relationships, develop trust, safeguard and uphold human rights and advocate on their behalf. To achieve this, funding needs to be made available to local authorities and integrated care systems across the country.

31 **Prioritise community-based care over hospital wards**

Inappropriate settings and hospital wards pose significant challenges for people with learning disabilities and those who are autistic, such as isolation, abuse and neglect, and disruption of social connections. The next UK Government should ensure there is sufficient community-based accommodation and that hospital wards are not the only option. This includes the redistribution of funding from hospital wards and inappropriate settings to community-based support services.



Housing

These policies apply to **ENGLAND** only

32 Eviction ban

The cost-of-living crisis is making life more difficult for people on lower incomes, and an increasing number of people are finding themselves unable to afford their rent. If a person or family cannot pay their rent, they are likely to face eviction. Due to the upfront costs of moving such as deposits, it is difficult for people to move to somewhere less expensive – especially as rents are getting more expensive. The next UK Government should introduce a pause on the enforcement of private sector evictions until a time that people are able to afford suitable accommodation for themselves and their families.

33 Ban no-fault evictions

The ban on no-fault evictions has been supported by successive UK Governments, but none of them have implemented the ban. Currently, landlords can issue a Section 21 notice for any reason, and they will then have to go to court to evict the tenant. This means that tenants can be evicted at short notice. The next UK Government should commit to finally implementing the ban.





Social Work Students

This policy applies to **ENGLAND** only



34 Reform social work student bursaries

Bursaries for social work students in England are in desperate need of reform, as there is a capped number available. There has been no increase in the number of bursaries made available since 2013, and the funding has been frozen for more than eight years, resulting in a real-terms cut in support. At a time when we need more social workers, it's critical that we're making the profession an accessible and viable career option for everyone. The next UK Government must review and improve the availability and value of social work student bursaries.



Working Conditions

These policies apply to **ENGLAND** only

35 Develop a Social Work workforce strategy prioritising recruitment and retention and professional career pathways specifically for all social workers

There needs to be a comprehensive review of pay, terms, and working conditions for social workers. Alongside this, there should be a national recruitment strategy to promote the profession in partnership with professional associations, schools of social work, and Social Work England in order to encourage more people to choose social work as a career. This includes a nationwide recruitment campaign, funded and coordinated by central government. Without addressing issues in recruitment and retention, pressures on services will grow.

36 A review into social work caseloads

BASW England's 80:20 campaign aims to reverse the current trend in social work where practitioners are spending most of their time on

administrative and process driven tasks, rather than on building relationships. Therapeutic, reflective, relationship-based practice is the best way for social workers to bring effective and positive change to those we support. Practitioners therefore need to be given the time to engage in this practice. There should be a review by the next UK Government into how we can implement the principles of the 80:20 campaign.

37 Funding and resourcing of the Workforce Race Equality Standard (WRES)

The next UK Government must ensure adequate funding and resourcing of the Workforce Race Equality Standard (WRES) in social care, with its implementation to be made a requirement for commissioners and employers as seen in NHS England. An anti-racism taskforce should also be set up to ensure greater accountability within the sector.



Public Accountability

This policy applies to **ENGLAND** only



38

Support the Public Accountability Bill (Hillsborough Law) in England

The Hillsborough Law is pivotal in establishing enforceable duties of candour and ensuring a fair balance between public authorities and those affected by disasters during inquests and inquiries. The next UK Government should give parliamentary time to the Bill and support it.



Carers

This policy applies to **ENGLAND** only

39

Paid Carers Leave

Unpaid carers provide an invaluable service to society, but they shoulder a financial penalty in doing so. The next UK Government should review the current support available to unpaid carers and introduce the right for carers to be paid by their employer with a model like that of maternity leave. There should also be enhanced support for all carers including young carers.





In Northern Ireland: Barnett Formula

This policy applies to **NORTHERN IRELAND** only

40 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>

Acknowledgements

Thank you to BASW members, committees, and staff for supporting and contributing to the creation of this manifesto.

The document was coordinated and drafted by Kerri Prince who can be contacted at Kerri.Prince@basw.co.uk

Cite as: BASW (2024) *Time to get it right. General Election 2024 Manifesto*. Birmingham: BASW.

Users are welcome to quote from this document provided that the source is correctly cited as above. Unattributed quotes are forbidden under copyright protection.

BASW

The professional association for
social work and social workers

www.basw.co.uk

