

BASW **England**

The professional association for
social work and social workers

BASW England's response to the Care Review Case For Change

August 2021



Feedback on the Care Review Case for Change **BASW England Response 13th August 2021**

Introduction

The British Association of Social Workers (BASW) is the professional association for social work in the UK with offices in England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. With over 22,000 members, we exist to promote the best possible social work services for all people who may need them while also securing the well-being of social workers working in all health and social care settings.

In responding to the Case for Change, we consulted with the BASW England members across all regions. The consultation has been conducted through a member survey, four seminars specific to the Review with up to 50 participants each time, BASW's Review steering group, BASW's Children and Families group, ongoing member correspondence by email and through BASW's ongoing conferences, and workshops.

Our member base is rich and diverse in terms of policy, expertise, social work and social care knowledge and practice. Therefore, those engaged in BASW's consultation include front-line social workers, team managers, retired social workers, and allied practitioners across child protection, adult social care and other specialist teams. It also includes registered social workers in management and consultancy roles, social work researchers and educators and practitioners in the voluntary sector and other organisations.

Due to sampling size and methods, the consultation cannot provide a statistical representation of BASW members' views regarding the Case for Change. However, the variety of consultation methods, alongside its iterative process, allows key themes to emerge that align with previous research, social work theory and other responses to the Review. The numeric data is enriched by direct quotes.

Before sharing the consultation's key findings, it is vital to note the frustration and disappointment amongst BASW members who responded. They felt there were many misrepresentations of social work and social workers in the Case for Change document.

Question layout

Questions were adapted to reflect concerns BASW identified as being key to the Review and sector engagement. There are three sub-sections which were divided as follows.

- The first section pertains to awareness of and ability to engage with the Review (from the perspective of practitioners and those they work with).
- The second section relates to the extent to which practitioners consider that the Case for Change accurately represents the social work role and the lives of the parents, carers and children they work with
- The third section relates to the strengths of the Case for Change document and reiterates areas where it is considered to be lacking.

Issues relating to equality, diversity and inclusion/anti-oppressive practice/anti-racist practice/anti-discriminatory practice were embedded throughout, and practitioners were invited to comment on them throughout the consultation process.

Section One: Do you know about the Review, and do you feel you can meaningfully contribute?

A mixed picture emerged regarding the extent to which members were aware of the Review, with some expressing clear, detailed knowledge and others less so. However, what members did know was primarily marked with concern, particularly around timescales, scope, and resources available to fund the recommendations reached by the Review. Many of the member's views reflected [BASW's terms of reference for the independent Review of children's social care](#).

With regards to the ability to contribute to the Review, members raised concerns about a pre-existing agenda with "minds being made up", it is "just another cost-cutting exercise", "opening the door to further privatisation" and it seems a "Big Society Version II". BASW members also highlighted difficulties in finding the time to engage with the Review due to their busy roles and the inaccessibility of contributing via online methods.

When it came to children and families themselves, an overwhelming majority of practitioners felt most of the families they work with neither knew about the Review nor were they proactively engaged in contributing meaningfully to the Review at a national/regional/place level. The unique challenges faced by some marginalised communities was acknowledged in the Case for Change. However, members were doubtful about the extent to which equality and diversity have been adhered to. There were concerns around the make-up and the recruitment of the Review's Experts by Experience. There were concerns that the Review's methodology did not adequately allow for the views of the marginalised to be heard with an

over-reliance on large charities and the well-known 'usual suspects' to represent the complex, sometimes conflicting views of the marginalised. This was again linked to members' feeling that the Review was not thorough enough, had an ever-expanding scope, and had an inappropriate timescale.

1. How much do you know about the Review? 5 being a lot, 1 being nothing?

The average response to this question on the online survey was 3.57. The percentage of those who selected each number was as follows:

- 5 – 19.05%
- 4 – 38.1%
- 3 – 23.81%
- 2 – 9.52%
- 1 – None

2. Please summarise what you know about the Review (e.g., purpose, scope, review team).

"The claim that current ways of working in the children and families sector isn't fit for purpose and social workers are over-involved in families' lives. Plus, disproportionate time spent on paperwork than on the front line."

"The scope seems to have changed - manifesto commitment was to review 'care', but the output seems to be more about child protection and care proceedings. I've followed the experts' groups and find the choice of Chair extremely controversial and unhelpful. Purpose - I worry that the underlying purpose is political and is about deregulation and changes to primary legislation."

"Very short timescale for Review. No money available to make changes. Communities are expected to step up and possibly a split between early help and child protection. Level of controversy in terms of the recruitment of lived experience participants on Panel."

"The structure and agenda of statutory social care have been money-saving based for 12 years - the leaders are forced to make decisions based on finance, not the needs of people."

3. Do you feel you can meaningfully contribute to the Review?

Options were divided into 'Yes', 'No' and 'Maybe'. Results were as follows:



Yes – 19.05%
No – 47.61%
Maybe – 28.57%

Please state why you do/do not feel able to?

"I received a poll today from What Works, and the questions were so leading it made meaningful contributions impossible. Closed, forced-choice answers that seemed to lead towards preferred conclusions and no free text boxes."

"Exclusive invites. No balance to CfC. Shows mind made up."

"I have read the Review. It made some good points but dabbled around issues. It had a bias to it. I wrote some views when asked by the Review as I searched it out, but most colleagues do not know it exists. "

"It is very difficult when you are overloaded with work to take the time needed to make a contribution. I often work additional hours to my contracted hours, and this leaves little time for other interests."

"Answering surveys via a link hidden within and the document does not feel a meaningful way to engage."

Please state how you found out about the Review

Respondents were provided with the following possible responses (see below). Results were as follows:

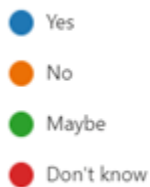
BASW – 23.81%
Local Authority/employer – 9.52%
Direct from the National Review Team - None

Social Work Union or other Union – 4.76%
Association of Directors of Social Work - None
Social Work England - None
National Media – TV, Radio, Articles – 23.81%
Twitter/Social Media – 19.05%
Search Engine – (Google, Yahoo, Other) - None
Word of mouth – 4.76%
Universities, colleges, CPD, training events - None
Other – 9.52%

Do you feel that the children and families you are working with know about the Review?

Options were divided into 'Yes', 'No' and 'Maybe' and 'Don't Know'. Results were as follows:

Yes – 5%
No – 80%
Maybe – 10%
Don't Know – 5%



Do you feel the children and families you work with can contribute meaningfully to the Review?

Options were divided into 'Yes', 'No' and 'Maybe'. Results were as follows:

Yes – 10%
No – 65%
Maybe – 25%



Please share your comments, including any aspects relating to equality, diversity and inclusion/anti-oppressive practice/anti-racist practice/anti-discriminatory practice

"There seems to be no transparency about how the evidence gathering process ensures diversity of opinion and reaches children and families without their voices being filtered through organisations".

"The Review is by a white upper/middle-class male. It needs a diverse team to do a real review. Tackling inequality did not seem to be a big issue in the Review. It was more about 'good practice' and targeted social workers who are struggling within an oppressive local authority."

"I worry poverty isn't being taken into account or the extent to which provision has been eroded".

"It will hear the voices who shout loudest."

"Both Lord Laming and Munro reviews have been meaningful, but their recommendations have either been sidelined or used to limit competent social work practice and relationships by successive governments."

Section Two: Does the document fairly represent the social work role and/or family life of children?

The majority of members felt that there had been a misrepresentation of the social work role, social work research, social work theory and social work's history, and legislation.

Misrepresentation of the social work role and funding of children's services

Members felt the complex and multifaceted social work role was neither understood nor fully appreciated within the Case for Change. Many of the BASW members also felt that not only was social work practice misrepresented, but also their specialist area of social work was inadequately covered.

There was concern that despite being peppered with a few platitudes, the Case for Change explicitly mentions social workers acting too soon, being unskilled, unknowledgeable, not understanding the *"profound impact of change and loss"* and having poor decision-making skills. Most of the consulted members felt that their role was undermined, which raised fears about stoking public distrust. This will ultimately harm children and families.

Several indicated that the document unfairly scapegoated front-line workers for the sector's failings. It did not appropriately acknowledge the impact of governmental policies after a decade of austerity, which has left social workers with no option but to practice in chronically underfunded conditions. Practising in a context of austerity over the past decade has severely limited the extent to which social workers can practice both safely and to the best of their ability. Members felt uneasy that the word 'austerity' did not feature once, nor was there thorough exploration regarding the cutting of services such as Sure Start. Instead, figures are misrepresented and appear to show a steady increase in monetary investment in children's services despite the converse being true.

Research from the 'Big five' children's charities shows that councils suffered a 29% cut in government funding for children's departments between 2010 and 2017-2018. Furthermore, according to Dr Eleanor Roy, health and social care policy manager at the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy, government spending on youth services, justice and children's centres has been slashed by 56% from 2009-2010 to 2017-18. Children's centres have been particularly badly hit with council spending on them falling by 62% over this period. The Case for Change document also uses 2012 as a baseline year for comparison rather than 2010 when the Austerity policies had an impact.

Research and anecdotal evidence clearly show that social workers have worked tirelessly to meet the increasingly complex needs of the most vulnerable population in pre- and post-

pandemic conditions. They have done so with depleting resources and funding whilst at the same time demand has skyrocketed to unprecedented levels.

Members report working "around the clock" to serve those they work with. They felt that their work in recent years has become "relentless". According to a recent BASW survey on the impact of COVID-19 on practice which surveyed over 1000 members, 70% said they are dealing with an increase in referrals and or cases compared to last year. Furthermore, around 25% of teams report being affected by COVID-19, meaning there are fewer social workers to do the work, whilst 30.7% - almost 1 in 3 - agreed or strongly agreed that they had felt under pressure to work while unwell.

Overall, many of the BASW members were disappointed that the Case for Change did not go far enough to highlight the impact of government policy and poverty, including food poverty, on families' lives. Many felt that returning money to the communities and services where there have been systemic cuts needs to be the starting point. The lack of a thorough exploration around the impact of funding and poverty furthered members concerns regarding the Reviews independence and being just a "cost-cutting exercise".

Misrepresentation of research

Some examples include:

- The yet to be peer-reviewed Jay et al., 2020 document does not mention social workers in their report as suggested in the Case for Change documents.
- The recent 'social gradient' research was highlighted. This links poverty to child abuse and neglect. However, the report infers that social workers are unduly investigating significant harm when the issue is actually about parenting in conditions of adversity. To suggest that practitioners simply conflate poverty with neglect and abuse is spurious and completely unsubstantiated.
- Although hinted at and peppered through the Case for Change, relationship-based practice and community-based social work (and the extensive research and practice evidence base to support these approaches) were not appropriately referenced, nor were their complexities and tensions discussed in depth.
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Misrepresentation of social work theory and social work history

A key concern for the members was the lack of recognition of social work as an internationally recognised profession rooted in human rights and social justice. There was no clear

commitment to upholding and bolstering well-established human rights legislation. For example, members raised concerns that well-intentioned dialogue around reducing bureaucracy was synonymous with weakening or diluting children's human rights (i.e., proposing that inspections and visits do not need to occur within statutory timelines).

The lack of affirmative commitment to outlawing unregulated placements for 16-and-17-year-olds was a further example of a lack of rights-based approach in which all children whether in or out of care are recognised as having rights to age-appropriate parenting and care. This does not adhere to [BASW's code of ethics](#), in which equality and anti-discrimination are central tenets.

Overall, the BASW consultation respondents felt that the anti-oppressive practice, the bedrock of all social work, and the tensions and continuous learning required to apply it in practice was inadequately covered in the Case for Change. For example, there was only one paragraph that mentioned anti-racist practice and relatively little mention of children with disabilities. There was also no mention of feminist theories or the gendered nature of social work at all levels.

Many of the members felt that many of the themes were highlighted as if they were new concerns and approaches when these matters have been debated throughout social work's history. For example, members were concerned with dialogue around separating 'intervention' and support. The issue of care vs control is central to ongoing, important debates within social work. However, international as well as UK research does not support such dichotomous separation. There also were concerns that residential assessment centres for children would pave the way for private companies, not allow continuity for a child, and de-skill social workers.

Misrepresentation of legislation

Some members interpreted the "*30-year-old tower of Jenga*" comment as referring to the Children Act 1989. It was felt that the Children Act 1989, in particular, was misrepresented. This legislation was hard-won over decades and protects the fundamental rights of children. Referring to this document as somehow outdated is erroneous. It is regularly revised to reflect the ever-evolving needs of children and young people through guidance, new Acts, new policies, and new regulations.

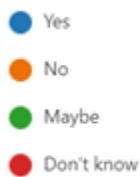
One of the reasons for the Children Act 1989 was to address the continuum between support and intervention to protect children from harm. However, some members pointed out that family support and section 17 is a statutory duty. Therefore, the report's separation between statutory duty to investigate and non-statutory duty to provide support is either a misinterpretation or disingenuous. Furthermore, in section 20, the intended purpose is not to support families within the community solely in order to avoid the need for out-of-home

care. Instead, section 20 and the statutory guidance explicitly provides for a child to be looked after for a shorter but sometimes a longer period, whenever possible by voluntary agreement. Parallels of rhetoric were noted between the Case for Change and Trowler's (2018) 'Case for Clear Blue Water'. This again caused some distrust as to the Review's independence.

Do you feel the Case for Change fairly represents the family lives of children who need support and protection?

Options were divided into 'Yes', 'No', 'Maybe' and 'Don't Know'. Results were as follows:

Yes – 10%
No – 52%
Maybe – 14%
Don't Know – 24%



Please share your comments, including any aspects relating to equality, diversity and inclusion/anti-oppressive practice/anti-racist practice/anti-discriminatory practice

"Young people live a different life. It is hard for most adults to know as the rate of change online, with trends, gaming is so rapid. Add the vulnerability of any child from any social class to county lines and DO NOT forget the huge disabled populations, and it is so clear that inclusion, anti-racist & anti-discriminatory practice is very difficult. Trying to be culturally competent in a non-competent statutory setting is hard...trying to have enough time in the community away from a laptop to connect with people is hard too."

"I don't feel it does. Women are over-represented in the care system as carers in every way. How does the Review discuss the hopes and career aspirations of girls, mothers and social workers?"

"In my opinion, the Family group conferences and systemic approaches to family meetings are key to fully involving children and their families in their plans and reviews."

Does the Case for Change meaningfully refer to your specialist area of social work (Adult, Children, Disability, EDT etc)?

Options were divided into 'Yes', 'No', 'Maybe' and 'Don't Know'. Results were as follows:

Yes – 35%
No – 55%
Maybe – 5%
Don't Know – 5%

Please share your comments, including any aspects relating to equality, diversity and inclusion/anti-oppressive practice/anti-racist practice/anti-discriminatory practice

"I work independently and have no idea how I communicate the challenges that have led to this and the alienation I feel from a system I believe in."

"There has been precious little about SEND and specifically SEND and mental health."

"I work in an edge of care team doing Solution Focussed Brief therapy. Often the hopes of Panel (live at home - even if there is hidden harm) do not match the hopes of families. It is government agenda over person-centred practice. The Review did not show a forceful will to influence and change government stereotypes."

Does the document fairly represent the skills and knowledge that you use in everyday social work?

Yes – 5%
No – 80%
Maybe – 10%
Don't Know – 5%

13. Does the document fairly represent the skills and knowledge that you use in every day social work?

[More Details](#)

- Yes
- No
- Maybe
- Don't know



Please share your comments, including any aspects relating to equality, diversity and inclusion/anti-oppressive practice/anti-racist practice/anti-discriminatory practice

"Too much focused on statutory duties and overlooking the relational and complex nature of Social Work that aren't always visible or quantifiable."

"The document is unjustifiably negative about social worker skills, and the WWCS poll seemed to guide responses towards saying we have a lack of knowledge about risk assessment - a core skill. It doesn't address key issues which, in my view, underlie poor practice - and difficulties with recruitment and retention. We know in practice that top-down mandates to 'improve social workers' are likely to disproportionately impact on minoritised colleagues."

"This report indicates that the author/authors do not fully understand what social work is - they keep lauding "direct work" and fail to understand that social work can involve much more than that. Of course, social workers would love to be able to work in an environment which is not dominated by performance indicators, is overly bureaucratic or having to use burdensome IT systems."

Section Three: What factors are lacking and/or have been highlighted well in the Case for Change?

All the BASW members who responded said they broadly welcome a Review that acknowledges that the current care system is not working for some children, with many families not receiving the help they need and have a right to. Respondents also appreciated the suggestions that it has been known for many years that there are too many unnecessary procedurally based administrative tasks in social work practice, rationing of services, and not enough time spent with families. However, the term 'bureaucracy' was considered to be ill-defined and sometimes wrongly used as synonymous with statutory regulation, or appropriate case supervision and team leadership. Members appreciated the acknowledgement that despite previous review recommendations around these issues, they are yet to be sufficiently tackled in many local authorities.

There was also strong agreement with the rhetoric that the *'power of a strong community network should not be underestimated'*. However, there were concerns that this should not be overestimated either.

Some BASW members were hopeful that the Review would take a holistic view of social work with children and families and lead to more reflective practice and better support for the workforce. Others feared that it would lead to further deregulation and privatisation of services. What is clear is that children's services and the lived realities for children and families are complex, complicated and nuanced.

Despite the Chair's foreword, the respondents strongly opposed that the conversation starts at the Review. They have seen discussions around these *"knotty topics"* happening throughout social work's history, in academic debates and publications, in training, and in everyday practice. The Review adds to these complexities whilst at the same time oversimplifying them. Members felt its controversy has led to further division, and its omissions and oversimplifications are likely to lead to further misunderstandings.

For example, as already noted, the focus of an over-bureaucratized service rather than an overly procedurally led practice was regretted. This allies with concerns regarding potential deregulation that can lead to the erosion of children's rights. It also does not fully understand the nuances of campaigns, such as BASW's 80/20 campaign, which argues for more reflective and meaningful practice, including more time spent with families, but also more effective recording, right-based advocacy, supervision, reflective spaces, and more focussed family-centred and co-produced assessment writing. Appropriate attention must be paid to the structural issues that impact all social work practice, with a clear focus on upholding children's rights.

Overall, there were concerns that the Review's narrative reaffirms public mistrust of social workers. For example, mentioning social work rates on the first page and later of social workers "*getting in the way*" suggests that having a social worker in your life will be negative rather than resulting in improved wellbeing. Once again, it seems that the finger of blame points mainly towards professionals who allegedly just trample over family lives and supposedly have not been creative, skilled, knowledgeable, compassionate, or reflexive enough.

BASW members also noted the following omissions.

- Not enough attention in addressing recruitment and retention issues. Concern that these pressing issues will not be helped by the Case for Change perpetuating the rhetoric of laying most of the blame with social work and social workers.
- Most felt that the omission of structural issues and government agenda over the past ten years, for example, by not mentioning austerity policies on housing, income levels and community facilities, failed to capture the realities of practice.
- Very little mention of children with disabilities.
- Insufficient attention given to the impact of poor mental health, the lack of mental health services or appropriate placements.
- Very little attention given to anti-oppressive practice.
- Very little attention given to a child's right to be protected from harm – Children's Rights must explicitly be at the heart of any review.
- Insufficient attention and misrepresentation of research (especially that conducted in Schools of Social Work to which students on qualifying and post-qualifying programmes contribute) and also practice-based knowledge.
- Very little attention given to the realities of social work practice, including long hours and the emotional impact on workers and their own family lives, especially during COVID-19.
- The weak proposal to only "*curb profits*" from large organisations that benefit by providing care for children. It was felt insufficient to gently suggest that such companies be a little more mindful that their stakeholders do not receive large amounts of money at the expense of children's rights, well-being and safety. This avoids the issue (tackled overtly in Wales and Scotland) of the ethics of tax-payers' money providing large profits out of vulnerable children and families.

- An over-reliance on neighbours, family, friends, many of whom are from increasingly impoverished communities. It was also noted that many families that require help are often also isolated.

Do you feel the Case for Change document has missed anything important out?

"Recruitment and retention. Risk aversion in allied professionals, e.g., education and health. Austerity and poverty. Academic and practice-based knowledge of abuse and neglect."

"The broader context of government policy, agenda, and funding over the past 10 years. The impact of COVID-19 on both professionals and families. That CSC continued to work with family through COVID-19, at times at risk to themselves."

"Yes - social work has one foot in the lives of vulnerable people and the other in the establishment. This could have been a rallying call to comrades to finally have social works voice heard, be appreciated as much as the NHS/police/fire service in the media and collectively fight for the people we work for in desperate poverty. Foodbank Britain, racist Britain, inequality Britain is not fair, and social workers say that every day to each other which has not impacted on the powers that be."

Do you feel there is anything that has been highlighted well in the Case for Change?

"The need for families to receive skilled help."

"The need for social care to be community-based"

"Children in care and their needs along with care leaver needs and the reality that children who are looked after do have higher involvement with health, criminal justice, unemployment brought about through lack of consistent education possibly through many placement changes as the child isn't matched and then the risk of homelessness due to earlier instability."

How do you feel the overall narrative will impact how others see the social work profession? For example, does the Case for Change give an appropriate balance between the achievements of social workers in helping children and families (whether in the community or through out-of-home care services) and the ways in which social workers are unable to provide a good enough service?

"This kind of narrative entrenches mistrust of social workers from families and individualises the structural issues in children's services. It will increase risk to children and social workers."

"I think it is likely that social workers will feel even more demoralised when the final recommendations come out."

"Social work profession has been misunderstood for decades, and yet again this Review does not balance appropriately and the reasons why the service is not what it should be. Yet again, the government put the blame on the front-line staff!!!"

With regards to the question above, what would be the impact for children and families?

"Funding cuts and restructuring."

"So many children and families are clued up about social services. They battle daily to get a fair deal. Not all of them know the links to policy. But none of them want a social worker; they want solutions. The narrative seems to be about social workers doing a bad job instead of the fact that they do not have the resources to do in-depth, thoughtful and partnership work with families."

"Unless significant funding is made available to, for example, provide Early Help services, and to deal with the causes of poverty, etc., there be little improvement in the lives of children and families."

What are your hopes and fears around the future of social work practice based on the document?

"It will become more performance management driven and privatised."

"The document hugely concerns me - both in terms of social workers' morale, trust between families and social workers, and the endgame which I feel is deregulation and a massive decrease in children's right to protection and a quality service from social workers."

"Social workers will be scapegoated again for the negative impact of government ideology and policies."

How well does the document address the importance of anti-oppressive practice, which is central to the social work profession?

"I don't see that it does - the stated aim to keep families together seems to be framed around an idealisation of family and a political shift from state responsibility to private family life. I don't think this framing is fundamentally about anti-oppressive practice and human rights, although on the surface it may mimic this".

"The report pays lip service to models enacted in Hertfordshire and Essex, but without real clarity in highlighting their ethics and values. It fails to address the under-reported issue of significant mental health. It mentions the lack of mental health services fleetingly as if they are a symptom and not a cause for children coming to the attention of children services".

Continued consultation with social workers

BASW is keen to ensure that the voices of social workers across areas of practice, roles and settings and our diverse members are clearly heard within this Review. During unprecedented times, social workers have demonstrated remarkable resilience, have made enormous personal sacrifices, and have practiced in creative ways to ensure the needs of the most vulnerable are met – all in the context of underfunded services where resources are scarce. It is essential that their wealth of expertise is captured and has a meaningful impact, with consideration to social work values and ethics, including equality, diversity and inclusion, anti-oppressive, anti-racist, anti-poverty, and anti-discriminatory practice. Finally, we ask, once again, that [BASW's 10 priority areas for the Review](#) are embedded within every stage to ensure the needs of children and families are at the very heart of every outcome.

We hope this evidence is helpful.

Please do not hesitate to contact england@basw.co.uk if you have any queries.