

**Re: SNP Leadership contest**

06 March 2023

Dear ,

As a candidate to be the next leader of the SNP, and First Minister of Scotland, I am writing to you to highlight challenges that social workers across this country are still facing.

March is World Social Work Month, a month dedicated to celebrating the achievements of the social work profession and highlight the incredible work and the contributions social workers make to their communities. So, this letter is perhaps timely.

**Key issues affecting social workers and everyone who might use social services:**

1. Scotland now has a crisis of recruitment and retention in social work and social care with increasing demand affecting assessment times and the availability of care and support.
2. Volume of government initiatives – Government is trying to do too much too quickly across a range of improvement programmes leaving the sector unable to engage fully.
3. Role of a social worker – social work is a holistic, relationship-based profession. With high eligibility thresholds and the lack of preventative work currently delivered, relationships with individuals, families and communities are often not developed until there is a crisis. At the other end of the work spectrum, social workers are seen as gate-keepers of local government resource.
4. Working conditions for social workers have deteriorated over the last few years. A range of surveys have shown very worrying trends:
  - One in four social workers leave within first 6 years of practice.<sup>1</sup>
  - 82% have experienced significant stress because of work.<sup>2</sup>
  - Overall stress scores for social workers in Scotland are much higher than the UK average.<sup>3</sup>
  - 50% described their current caseload as “not at all manageable”.<sup>2</sup>
  - Lack of effective supervision and access to ongoing training.

SASW asks you to support social workers and **to prioritise addressing the recruitment and retention challenges**. Without a well-qualified, accessible, and supported workforce, Scotland will not be able to implement any radical reforms to social services, achieve the ambitions of The Promise or realise human rights in our public services.

I look forward to receiving your response, and to working together to find solutions.

Yours,

Alison Bavidge,  
National Director, SASW

Jude Currie,  
Chair, SASW Committee

---

<sup>1</sup> [Setting the Bar: towards an indicative maximum caseload for Scotland's public sector social workers - Social Work Scotland](#)

<sup>2</sup> Social Worker's Union UK-wide survey- June 2020- 363 respondents

<sup>3</sup> [Setting the Bar 2: 'Taking the wheel' - Social Work Scotland](#)