24/03/2020

Dear First Minister

I write to you at extraordinary times and wish to thank you and Welsh Assembly Government for all the work you are doing to keep us safe, in the most challenging of circumstances.

We are of course ensuring that our members have access to the most up to date information and advice, from relevant sources.

At the start of the pandemic, BASW initiated a survey <https://www.basw.co.uk/social-work-during-coronavirus-covid-19-ongoing-survey> to hear directly from our members on the front-line about their experiences during the pandemic. So far, we have had over 1200 responses and are in the process of analysing them and responding to the concerns raised. We will share these concerns with you, Social Care Wales and local government stakeholders as soon as is practicable.

Before the pandemic, we had been raising with the deputy minister for social services, Social Care Wales, Welsh Local Government Association, ADSS Cymru and workforce leads in Welsh Government, our deep concerns over the capacity and resilience of the social work workforce (based on our 2018 working conditions research) especially in relation to:

* recruitment and retention
* presenteeism
* sickness levels
* attrition rates for post qualifying learning
* falling numbers choosing to enter the profession
* workforce wellbeing
* the social work demographic – overwhelmingly women with an average age of 46 years

The current pandemic and the need to ensure we have enough social workers to continue to provide essential services to the most vulnerable citizens in Wales, is of huge concern. Social work was under immense pressure before the crisis and many staff will be exposed to the virus through direct contact in their work, they may need to self-isolate and because of the demographic, many female social workers will have caring responsibilities either side of the age spectrum, some of whom will be in the most vulnerable groups, including social workers themselves.

We know of many instances where social workers are self-isolating because of Covid-19 like symptoms in family members, or in those they support, but don’t know for sure because of lack of testing.

We understand that the new Emergency Covid-19 Bill will allow for social workers to be returned to the Register and for social work students to be fast tracked into qualification; what we seek is clarity in relation to how this will happen.

We would like assurances that:

* Social workers have access to the appropriate personal protection equipment needed to undertake their essential roles.
* Social workers will have swift access to testing to determine whether they should be self-isolating or can return to work.
* Social workers have clarity around the use of Schools for children needing care, for them to work.
* Clear and unambiguous processes for temporary registration of returning social workers and student social workers, including what their needs are, during and post the pandemic.
* Clear processes for independent social workers to work in the frontline.
* Free public transport for social workers, in line with arrangements for NHS staff.

We are also concerned that the Emergency Covid-19 Bill will create changes to the duties to assess and meet need under the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014, along with changes to the Mental Health Act which do create significant human rights challenges. We have written to Parliamentarians to signal our concerns, as the Bill passes through the commons, which I have attached.

We are doing, and will continue to do, all that we can to support and care for the profession during unprecedented times and look to work in collaboration and partnership with Welsh Assembly Government and sector leads, to ensure that we safeguard the most vulnerable citizens in Wales.

Kind regards

**Allison Hulmes**

**Wales Director, BASW Cymru**