

British Association of Social Workers

England Manifesto 2021

People who are elected to public office in England are normally elected for a four-year term, after which they can seek further re-election. This does not apply to the UK Parliament which can hold elections whenever it sees fit providing it is no more than 5 years since the last. Because the people who hold public office change regularly, organisations hoping to lobby decision-makers must keep revisiting their campaigns to make sure that the new politicians are informed about the key issues.

There are elections taking place in England on 6th May 2021 for some regional Mayors, the Greater London Assembly, and many local councils. BASW England have made it a priority to engage with politicians across the country, and once the elections have taken place, we will make efforts to keep pushing the importance of policies that impact our members and the people that they work with.

Below are the key six issues that BASW England will continue to campaign on.

Wellbeing of staff

Social workers have been the ‘forgotten frontline’ during the COVID-19 pandemic and have had to navigate the complexities of lockdown and what this has meant for the people that social workers support and work with. The long-term effects of COVID-19 on the public, both mentally and physically, will be felt by social workers both on a personal level and professionally as their caseloads increase.

We ask that politicians consider the impact that their decisions will make on social work professionals and ensure that wellbeing of staff is a core consideration in policy development.

Recognition of social work

The work that social workers do can often go unnoticed by many people unless they have received support from a social worker. Many people will not fully understand the important contributions that they make to individuals, local communities, and wide society.

From working with people who have learning disabilities or autistic people, child safeguarding and intervention, mental illness, substance abuse, limited or no mental capacity, domestic violence, or carrying out age assessments for asylum-seeking children - the work of a social worker does not stop.

We ask that politicians work to understand what it is that social workers do and recognise their contributions.

Values and ethics

Social workers are committed to fighting oppression, but the system that social workers operate within is oppressive and unequal. From the inequalities that COVID-19 has highlighted, to the murder of George Floyd – we are far away from living in a society that is truly equal and just.

We ask that politicians promote, support, and legislate for the embedding of anti-oppressive, anti-discriminatory and anti-racist values and ethics in all stages of education and learning - including nursery, primary, secondary, higher education. It is important that education and learning curricula

is inclusive, represents the contribution of all cultures and embraces an honest and transparent reflection of domestic, UK and international history. Social work education must also focus on anti-oppression and anti-racism in our society, and how these are relevant to everybody's lives. Not all groups of people are treated equally, and that must change.

Time for social work and putting people with lived experience at the heart of decision making

When making policies, it is essential that those it directly impacts are involved in the development. Local authorities should not be making decisions about people, without their input. Decision-makers should bring a broad range of voices to every table to prevent policies and approaches from excluding people.

We ask that politicians use their executive and scrutiny powers to make sure procedures and policies are accessible and inclusive for all people, especially those most impacted by any decisions or approaches and that social workers have 'time' to do social work and fully engage with the people they directly work with.

Tackling the causes of social work crisis intervention

There are social issues that impact caseload figures, the complexities of a person's needs, and these could be addressed through other policies. Poverty can often be a root cause of needing social work intervention. That is not to say that people who do not live in poverty do not require support from a social worker, but that poverty can make life significantly more challenging and difficult.

Poverty is also a root cause of homelessness, which can lead onto further mental and physical illnesses. Because statutory social work intervention tends to take place at crisis point, there are many people whose lives may never have reached that point if there were fully funded preventative measures in place that everyone in need could access. Tackling food poverty should be a core ambition of local and national government. The increase in the number of people using foodbanks is a national scandal and addressing food poverty and the causes of it should be a policy priority.

We ask that politicians make efforts to alleviate poverty and the causes of poverty in their role as local politicians, but also through their political parties or by using their platform of campaign on these issues.

Covid-19 Government Inquiry

We add our voice to the call for a public inquiry into the Government's response to the pandemic. We also support the call for a rapid review by Covid-19 Bereaved Families for Justice. Families and communities will feel the impact of the people we have lost for years to come. It is also important that a review is carried out so that we can plan for the future. Social workers have reported a lack of contingency planning in local authorities with regards to the pandemic, which resulted in staffing crises, a lack of digital infrastructure to support remote working, unclear public health guidance, lack of PPE amongst myriad other issues. We are likely to encounter new viruses again, and lessons must be learnt about what went wrong. It is through looking at what could have been done better that we can make sure the country is prepared for any future pandemic.