

UNISON Social Work Manifesto

UNISON is the trade union for Social Workers. UNISON recognises that throughout the health and social care sector Social Workers play an important role in supporting the most vulnerable in our society. But their role is often hidden or portrayed negatively in the media.

UNISON believes that Social Workers must be celebrated and given proper resources to do their vital work.

UNISON is standing up for Social Workers in the significant challenges they face - continued service cuts, rising demand for services, growing caseloads. We believe our fight for better working conditions and genuine development opportunities will result in better services for the public.

Our Social Work manifesto calls on government and employers to support Social Workers in 5 vital ways:

1. Improve Social Worker working conditions

Employers must ensure social workers have a safe working environment, free from bullying and harassment. This includes not just the public but also unreasonable demands and criticism from managers. Employers should actively monitor and tackle issues such as unpaid overtime, work related stress and heavy caseloads. Provide a culture where social workers can discuss workload and stress issues with their supervisor/manager and agree satisfactory ways forward.

2. Promote a positive image of Social Work and Social Workers

The important role social workers play in society needs highlighting and celebrating. Social workers help thousands of vulnerable citizens along with their families and carers. Yet the media is only interested when something goes wrong. This leads to staff demoralisation and a negative image for the profession. Social workers have ensured a decade of austerity and low pay but have put their grievances aside to do an incredible job during the pandemic. They deserve respect and status.

3. Invest in Social Worker Development

Employers should invest in recruitment and retention strategies to reduce the turnover of social workers. They should provide Social Workers with dedicated time, resources and financial support to carry out continuous professional development for their social work development. Social Workers should be given realistic opportunities to develop fulfilling careers.

4. End austerity and rebuild public services

UNISON is campaigning for more government investment in social work and social care funding as part of rebuilding our public services and creating fairer and safer workplaces. The political choice of austerity has led to the most vulnerable in our society being put at risk. Cuts and closures of many services have meant many people are struggling to get help when they need it. Social workers are seeing people at breaking point. As a result, their caseloads are more complex, workload is unbearable. The pandemic has exacerbated this crisis in social work as more children, families and adults need social work help and support.

5. End privatisation of health and social care

UNISON supports the role of local government as planners and major providers of personal/community based social services. Social workers should be embedded in communities where they are recognised as a resource. Outsourcing of health and social care provision has led to poorer services and eroded democratic control. We oppose privatisation and campaign for services to be taken back in-house into a fully funded public sector. This will end the fragmentation of the health and social care sector.