



UNISON's 10 point plan to improve adult social work services

UNISON is the union for social work in the UK, with more than 40,000 social workers in membership. There has recently been an intense focus on the role of social work in protecting vulnerable children – but UNISON believes that keeping adults who find themselves in vulnerable circumstances safe and well is also vitally important to society.

People are living longer with more complex needs, mental health legislation is getting more complex and there is a need to ensure that people's human rights are protected and that they get care and support which enables them to live independent and fulfilled lives.

Social work staff play a critical role in all of this and we believe their voice needs to be heard in debates about the future of social care services. We have been asking our members about the changes they think are needed in social work and based on this UNISON is campaigning for a 10-point plan to improve social work services for adults.

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1 Planned programme of investment: covering safeguarding and preventative services so that more staff can be employed, with better pay and working conditions, better support systems and the right tools to do the job.

2 Clear political commitment to strengthen the role of social work in adult services including the personalisation agenda:

clear statements through government policy and regulation channels about the central importance of social work in care and support of adults, and commitment to halting the development of 'social work on the cheap'.

3 Urgent action plan to fill vacancies: including revival of on-the-job training schemes; employers 'guarantee' of good working conditions; 'bank' staffing pools run and owned by groups of local authorities to provide reliable and cost-effective relief staff cover.

4 More social workers and support staff based on optimum staffing models: which can assess the right staffing numbers and skill mix against local population numbers and needs. The staffing model should include all in social work teams including skilled administrators. Extra capacity in teams for support, mentoring and development activities and for staff to have enough time to work directly with service users.

5 Cull of bureaucracy and performance targets, more contact with service users: a root and branch zero-based review of all bureaucracy, and consideration of measures used to cut red tape in schools. Overhaul of performance indicators which skew priorities. Investment in skilled and well-rewarded administrators. Reversing the split in how social workers spend their time so 80% is spent on people not paperwork.

6 National standards on acceptable caseloads: enforced through the inspection process and regularly audited by the council or trust leadership, with sanctions against employers who breach the Code of Practice for Social Care Employers.

7 Better support and more reflective practice: consistent, high quality supervision that is both supportive and challenging, focuses on the needs of the worker, not the organisation's performance indicators and builds in time for reflection and mentoring.

8 Better pay and career structures: to reward expertise and experience in practice rather than exit to management and to redress the devaluing of social work compared with pay in other professions.

9 Review of the position of social work in health settings: to remove structural barriers to effective joint working and strengthening the status and representation of social work at all levels within NHS organisations.

10 Change of management culture: root out bullying and 'blame culture' in favour of an enabling and supportive management based on professional respect. Give staff more involvement, consultation and say in policy and practice development.