

BASW Cymru

The professional association for
social work and social workers



Senedd

Etholiad
26 Election

Wales decides

Cymru yn penderfynu



www.BASW.co.uk/Senedd2026

Forewords



The 2026 Senedd election is likely the most significant since 1999, featuring major voting system changes. It expands Members of the Senedd (MSs) by nearly 40%, from 60 to 96, adopts a full party-list voting system,

meaning all MSs will be elected via the proportional representation system, reduces constituencies from 40 to 16 with each represented by six MSs, and shortens the Senedd term from five years to four.

With sweeping political changes on the horizon, Wales's social work profession stands at a critical juncture, grappling with enduring and new challenges in supporting individuals, families and communities. Recruitment struggles, retention difficulties, and the urgent need for a fair, transparent pay structure offer a bold chance to revolutionise investment in social work, securing its strength for today and tomorrow.

The incoming Welsh Government should boldly embrace opportunities to transform and elevate the social work profession by introducing a new Children's Bill for Wales (Bil Pob Plentyn), significantly improve working conditions for all social workers and ensure that bureaucracy is reduced and we become a practice led profession. These initiatives, contained in our manifesto, would strengthen the profession's development and enhance public confidence in social workers further.

BASW Cymru is fully driven by our members; social workers committed to advancing the profession in every way. This manifesto was created by and for social workers and is the collective voice of social work and social workers across Wales. We are ready and eager to collaborate with the next Welsh Government to deliver meaningful, positive change that benefits the profession and every citizen in every community across Wales.

**Professor Sam Baron,
BASW CEO (interim) &
BASW Cymru National Director**



BASW Cymru has an impressive reputation as a dedicated member association committed to partnering with organisations, governments, members, and the

broader associated workforce to support people in overcoming life's challenges and obstacles. Our reach and impact are impressive in representing social workers in Wales.

On the eve of political change here in Wales, the next Welsh Government faces critical decisions, with no group more deserving of priority than the vulnerable, marginalised, and those in need, communities tirelessly supported by our social workers day in, day out.

I challenge the next Welsh Government to act courageously and ambitiously, delivering a constructive, optimistic programme of work that brings tangible benefits to all of Wales and its citizens.

**Andrew Pennington,
Chair, BASW Cymru**

BASW Cymru and our manifesto asks

BASW Cymru, part of British Association of Social Workers, a UK-wide organisation, is the largest professional membership organisation for social work in Wales. Our mission is to:

- ▶ **Act for social workers**
- ▶ **Act for social work**
- ▶ **Act for a better society**

We represent the voice of social workers and the social work profession by campaigning, influencing government, key stakeholders and policy makers in addition to delivering professional development opportunities, resources, advice, and member representation.

We are the voice of social work in Cymru

BASW Cymru campaign tirelessly to deliver positive change and well-being for the social work profession, and for children, young people and adults who use social work services across Wales.



Our Key Asks

BASW Cymru is calling on the next Welsh Government to:

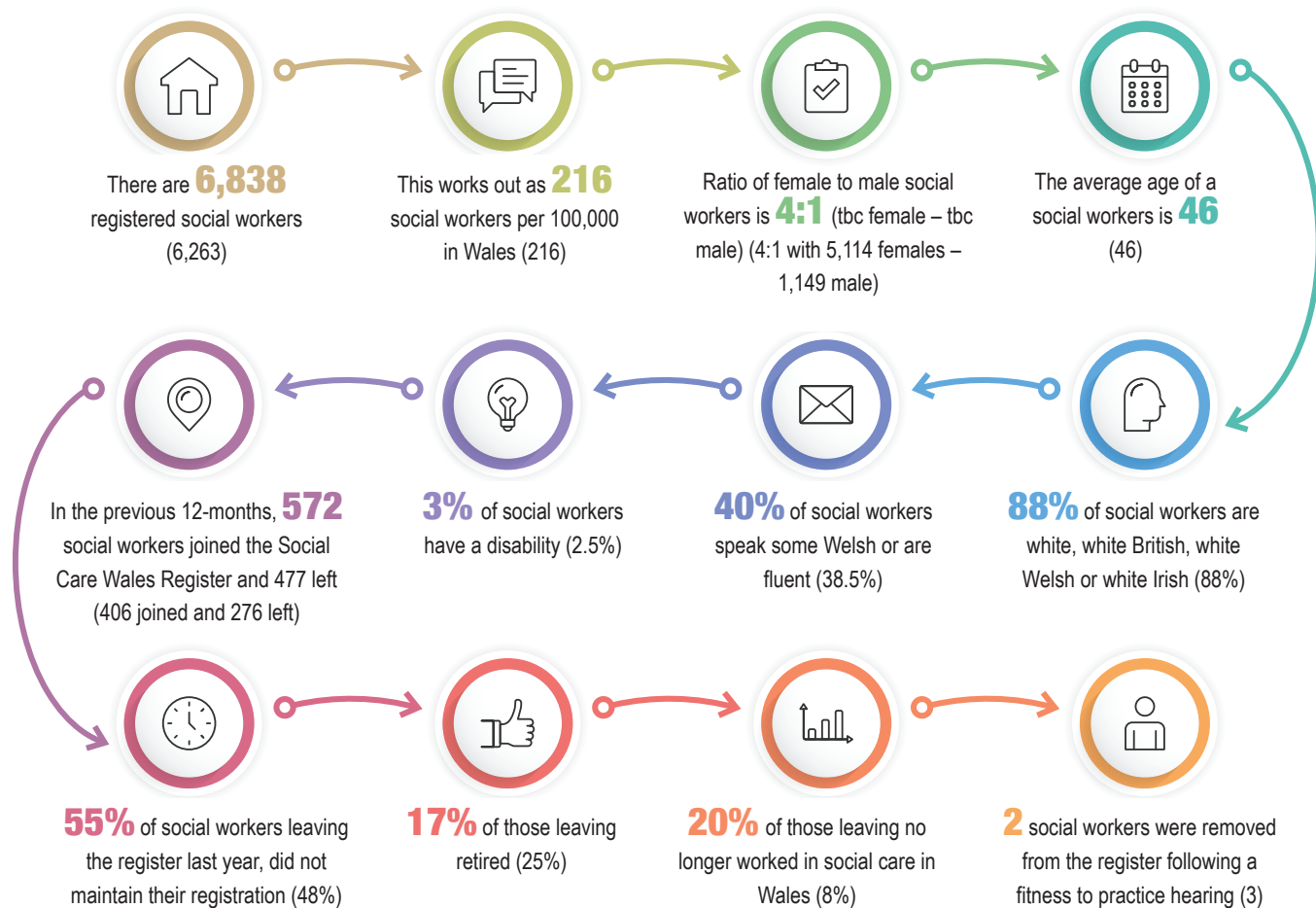
- 1** Introduce a **national pay scale for social workers** across Wales, ensuring parity with teachers and the Welsh NHS. This will improve retention, recruitment and confidence levels across all communities in Wales.
- 2** Support the **creation of a Code of Professional Practice** specific to social workers who practice in Wales. Social work specific Codes of Practice raise the standing of professions by providing enhanced guidance, setting clearer standards and identifying social work as a profession distinct from social care.
- 3** **Invest in a nationally recognised Continuing Professional Development (CPD) framework for social work in Wales.** Fully funded and recognised by the profession and employers.
- 4** **Increase the financial value of social work bursaries for student social workers,** to increase the number of students starting on their social work journey. An increase will aim to widen the social demographic of those entering the profession and to support student social workers to qualify without negative impacts on them and their families.
- 5** **Invest in communities across Wales** to create significant social, economic, and environmental benefits, contributing to overall well-being and resilience and **position the social worker profession as a pivotal role** in maximising the impact of these investments, acting as facilitators, advocates, and practitioners who bridge individual needs with systemic change.
- 6** Implement a **nation-wide media campaign across Wales to promote the social work profession in a positive manner** and to encourage a wider diversity of people entering the profession. Specifically, to attract men, who currently make up less than 25% of the profession in Wales.
- 7** **Recognise unpaid carers as a priority group in shaping future anti-poverty and cost-of-living policies** and work collaboratively with unpaid carer organisations and carers to develop these measures.

In addition, we look forward to working together with the newly formed Welsh government to ensure:

- 1. Social work is a practice-led profession within each organisation.** Ensure the working practices and interventions are grounded in real-world experience, directly addressing the complex, dynamic needs of individuals and communities.
- All social workers, registered with Social Care Wales, should become **members of a professional association** and adhere to its code of ethics. Mandatory membership of a professional association provides support, professional development, developing the profession of social work. Membership would also support and enhance workforce retention levels.
- We work together to **embed children's rights in Welsh law through the proposed legislation Bil Pob Plentyn** (Law for Every Child), developed by the cross-party groups Children in Our Care and Children and Families. The draft legislation includes demands for enhanced access to early intervention and prevention services, strengthened corporate parenting, improved access to quality housing, education, and care, and the establishment and publication of anti-poverty targets.
- We **introduce a Welsh Family Fund**, based on the Alaska family funding system, where the 10,000 children born into poverty in Wales each year, will be supported by a fund of £1,800 per year for the first three years of life.
- We **introduce access to Universal Secondary Free School Meals** across Wales, in direct response to the cost-of-living constraints, to tackle child poverty and to ensure not a single child goes hungry in school.
- We imbed **mental health and well-being considerations** for young people **when developing and introducing climate change policy and promotional campaigns.**
- We become the first UK nation to bring forward legislative proposals to **remove profit from adult social care** for adults and their families living in Wales other than in defined exceptional circumstances.

Profile: Social Work Workforce in Wales

(in brackets last election data)



Latest social worker workforce data from Social Care Wales (April 2022/March 2025), compared to latest workforce data available at the last Senedd elections (2021) from Social Care Wales (April 2019) and used in BASW Cymru 2021 manifesto

Endorsement by The Social Workers Union

“The Social Workers Union (SWU) fully endorses BASW Cymru’s manifesto. The Welsh Government must invest in social work and invest in communities to make people’s lives better. SWU is proud to work alongside BASW Cymru to advocate for the rights and wellbeing of social workers and the individuals they support. Our upcoming joint campaigns to improve working conditions for social workers and to increase social work student bursaries are just the first steps, and we look forwards to the work from this manifesto creating positive, tangible, and long-lasting change in Wales.”

SWU Social Workers Union

BASW Cymru Manifesto: Wales Decides!

Since the last Senedd Election in 2021, social workers across Wales have navigated a complex landscape of challenges while continuing to play a central role in supporting individuals, families and communities. This period has been marked by significant workforce shortages exceeding 30% across 17 of Wales's 22 local authorities in 2022, financial pressures, and policy decisions, all of which have impacted on the profession and its direction of travel. Despite these challenges, social workers remain vital to people's lives by fostering community resilience, safeguarding vulnerable populations, making significant contribution to reducing poverty, and promoting social justice. And importantly, allowing people to live the lives they choose to live.

One of the most pressing challenges for the social work profession in Wales is the constant shortage of qualified professionals. As of 2022, there were approximately 485 vacancies in social work across 17 of Wales' 22 local authorities, with vacancy rates topping more than 30% in some areas, such as Newport, Bridgend, and Ceredigion. Children's social services accounted for over two-thirds of these vacancies, highlighting the critical demand in this sector. The high vacancy rates are driven by difficulties in recruitment and retention, made all the worse by the profession's negative public image. Misconceptions, such as the belief that social workers primarily remove children from families for no significant rational, potentially deterring new entrants to the profession and contribute to the profession's recruitment crisis¹.

Inconsistent pay and challenging working conditions are significant barriers to retaining social workers. A 2023 Social Care Wales survey revealed that 26% of social care workers felt it was "quite" or "very" likely they would leave the sector within the next 12-months, with 44% considering leaving within five years.

The primary reasons cited were inadequate pay (66%), feeling overworked (54%), and poor employment conditions (40%).

The demanding nature of social work, coupled with limited career progression opportunities, further discourages retention. Social workers often face high caseloads and emotional burnout, particularly in children's services, where the complexity of cases has increased².

The period since the last Senedd Election has seen significant policy developments, including the introduction of the Health and Social Care (Wales) Bill in 2024, which aims to reform children's and adults' social care. However, although the removal of profit from both residential and foster care for children was fully welcomed by BASW Cymru, we share the concerns that have been raised, such as the need to listen to frontline voices by ensuring an already stretched public system and workforce receives the desperate investment it needs to avoid even greater pressures being felt further down the line.

Despite these challenges, social workers in Wales remain a cornerstone of community well-being. Their contributions are multi-layered and often complex, addressing the needs of vulnerable individuals and families while promoting social cohesion and equity. Their pivotal role in Wales's Flying Start programme exemplify this, proving a holistic approach not only transforms individual lives but also strengthens the social fabric of Wales, making social workers indispensable to community resilience and community equity³.

Social workers empower people by focusing on their strengths and helping them live lives that matter to them. They work discreetly in homes and communities, often preventing crises by connecting individuals to resources and support networks.

¹ Ferguson, H. (2016). "Researching Social Work Practice Close Up: Using Ethnographic and Mobile Methods to Understand Encounters Between Social Workers, Children and Families."

² Social Care Wales, "Workforce Development Report" (2017)
British Association of Social Workers, "State of Social Work Report" (2015)

³ GOV.WALES, "Analysis of Flying Start outcomes using linked data: emerging findings" (2019)

BASW Cymru Manifesto: Wales Decides!

Across Wales, social workers have embraced strengths-based approaches, ensuring adults' voices are heard in care planning. Data from 2022–23 shows that 82% of local authorities reported comprehensive care and support plans for adults, reflecting social workers' dedication to tailored solutions that promote independence over reliance⁴.

Social workers also play a critical role in limiting the impact of poverty across Wales. Poverty remains a stubborn challenge, with 22% of Welsh residents (700,000 people) living below

ethnic communities disproportionately affected by poverty. Their work with food banks and energy debt advisors has been vital as basic needs crises surged. We also fully welcome Welsh Government's commitment to a new Consultant Social Worker -race role, hosted by BASW Cymru, which will drive forward anti-racist practice and ensure greater equity for those disadvantaged due to their ethnicity.

Social workers play a vital role in safeguarding children and adults at risk. They work to ensure safe placements for the nearly 2,000 children in



the poverty line in 2021–24, including 31% of children. Social workers witness the impact that poverty creates daily, supporting families facing food insecurity, energy debt (up 144% from 2019–24), and water poverty (affecting 175,000 households). Disabled individuals (32% poverty rate) and informal carers (31%) are particularly vulnerable to the impact of poverty, with low employment rates compounding their challenges. Social workers advocate for these groups but are constrained by limited resources and the UK Government's control over key social security levers.

Social workers also connect families to services like the Welsh Government's free school meals program, expanded Flying Start Scheme, and Discretionary Assistance Fund. They challenge structural inequalities and support marginalised groups, including Black, Asian, and minority



private foster or residential care, addressing the increasing complexity of needs. They also help vulnerable adults navigate the social care system to ensure their voices, wishes, and rights are respected and promoted. Their efforts help maintain family stability and prevent harm, contributing to safer communities across Wales.

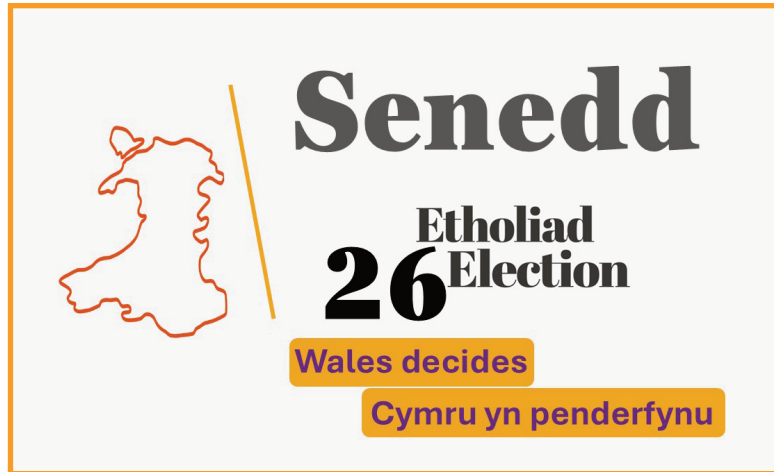
Sustained investment and public perception shifts are needed to secure the profession's future. By valuing and supporting social workers, Wales can strengthen its social care system and continue to build resilient, inclusive, safer and happier individual and communities.

We look to the next Welsh Government to act with courage, boldness, and innovation to make decisions that benefit not only the social work profession but every individual across Wales.

⁴ GOV.WALES: Social Services Activity 2022–23 (2024)



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