

November 2021

Keeping the Promise – the report of the Independent Care Review

The new report from UNISON's Social Work Issues Group says that to implement The Promise in the way that children and young people have asked for we need:

- significant investment by the Scottish Government in core front-line statutory children and families social work services;
- investment in the wider services needed to support children and families within the community.
- Investment in the workforce: staffing and caseloads in statutory social work teams must be at a level that enables relationship-based work with children and the workforce to be properly supported.

Children's rights need resources: we need investment and a change in the managerialist culture within social work to deliver The Promise at local level.

WHAT YOUR BRANCH CAN DO:

1. Send the report ['Keeping the Promise'](#) to your senior social work managers and table it for discussion.
2. Send the report to elected members on the appropriate LA committee or HSCP.
3. Ask your senior social work managers:
 - a) How they intend to fund The Promise including make sure that early intervention projects and services for children and families are protected in the 2022/23 budget round;
 - b) What financial planning or modelling work is being done by your LA or HSCP to work out the cost of implementing The Promise locally?
 - c) Does this consider the costs of implementation within statutory children and families social work services?
 - d) Is any investment being planned in frontline statutory children and families social work so that relationship-based practice is enabled, as the Promise asks for?
4. Workforce voice: Ask senior managers:
 - a) Is there a local working group responsible for Promise implementation?
 - b) How is the workforce represented on this and can the branch have representation? Will the UNISON social work staff representative be supported by managers to carry out this role?
 - c) How is success in The Promise implementation being measured? Are the experience and views of the workforce part of this?

Feed back to the Social Work Issues Group via Joe Lynch: j.lynch@unison.co.uk SWIG would like to gather a picture of what is happening across Scotland.

KEEPING THE PROMISE: KEY FINDINGS

UNISON'S SURVEY OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES SOCIAL WORK STAFF

- The Promise sets out the type of social work practice UNISON members want to provide and came into social work to deliver: relationship based, child-centred, needs-based practice.
- Children and families' social workers strongly support the Promise but believe it won't be delivered unless significant extra staffing and resources are provided by the Scottish Government.

Relationship-based practice

Relationships are the core of social work: services which do not provide the time for relationships cannot achieve the outcomes the Promise wants for children and families.

- Social workers say they do not have time to build relationships with children; understaffing, high caseloads, the demands of paperwork and process-driven systems mean they must prioritise those most in crisis.
- 74% of social workers say their team does not have enough staff.
- To make sure children are seen, 49% skip breaks or work late all the time to keep on top of workload.
- Organisational cultures prioritise paperwork over relationship-based work with children and families. A change in the managerialist culture and more time to spend building relationships are the changes most desired by social workers.

Child centred practice

- Decisions made about children are resource-led rather than child-led in the final instance; 90% said resources determine placement decisions when a child becomes looked after.
- A lack of funding and resources is a major cause of children's needs going unmet or not being best met.
- Social workers are frustrated at not being able to find the resources and services that children need and this contributes to placement breakdown for looked after children.

Supporting families

- 77% say that intensive family support in their area is not sufficient to meet need;
- Earlier intervention is needed but is not possible for financial reasons, with higher thresholds and tighter criteria used to ration support.
- There is a lack of resources to support the families of children with disabilities.
- There are strong concerns about the lack of support for kinship carers in comparison to foster carers.

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