The Scottish Association of Social Work (SASW) – part of BASW UK – is the professional association for social workers in Scotland. We’re here to promote the best possible social work services for all people who may need them, while also securing the well-being of social workers.

Social work provides fundamental support to all 32 of Scotland’s local authorities. Highly trained and skilled, social workers make specific contributions to a range of complex social and medico-legal circumstances from protecting vulnerable children and adults to assessing if an individual is safe to remain in the community. Recent years have seen local authority social work enter a state of flux. Resources available to deliver specialist services have fallen in real terms, but in the context of greater need and increased referrals due to rising poverty, the impact of austerity, and significant change to the welfare system. Our members tell us they feel pressured and less effective with growing demand and shrinking provision on all sides.

In June 2019, the SSSC published a report which examined the supply, stock and demand for social workers, primarily within local authorities. This drew on data from the SSSC register, and their annual survey of local authority social work staff. The data found that overall numbers of registered social workers employed by local authorities have risen slightly, but there has been a significant decrease in the numbers working in other areas, including the voluntary and third sector – an 18% fall since 2016. This reflects our anecdotal evidence which points to a dramatic reduction of local authority investment in joint working innovations and 3rd sector complimentary support services to social workers performing statutory duties.

For instance, in 2016/17, Lothian Alcohol and Drug Project funding was cut from £11.5 million to £8.8 million and stayed at that level, causing the end of number of services including a modest mental health support to LA care leavers. This service had completely halted a previous spate of suicides in this population in the years immediately before the innovative service. This is despite evidence of care leavers being 5 times more likely to end up in prison/psychiatric care than their non-care leaver peers. The reduction in this funding demonstrates a failure to invest in early interventions which could improve outcomes and reduce demands on costlier public services and more restrictive interventions in the long term.

In 2011, the Christie Commission report highlighted the need for a move towards preventative spending, estimating that as much as 40 per cent of all spending on public services is accounted for by interventions that could have been avoided by prioritizing a preventative approach. Reductions in funding for third and voluntary sector services

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reflects a shift away from a preventative and early intervention approach, which we believe would positively impact both community wellbeing and both Local Authority and other agency spending such as NHS and Police in the long term. Scottish Government can help create an enabling climate for this.

Scottish Association of Social Work

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