BASW
The professional association for social work and social workers

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Mr Boris Johnson MP
Prime Minister
10 Downing Street
Westminster
London SW1A 2AA

1st April 2020

Dear Prime Minister,

Social workers are on the front line of efforts to minimise the impact of Covid-19. As you know, social workers across the four countries of the UK undertake a range of statutory duties including protecting vulnerable children and adults, supporting disabled adults and frail older people and working with individuals who face severe mental health challenges as well as other important work.

The British Association of Social Workers (BASW) is the professional association for social work and we represent more than 21,000 members. We have received over 1500 responses from our members about the most pressing issues and challenges they are facing in the current crisis. Of most pressing concern are issues of safety.

1. **Personal Protective Equipment**

Social workers, alongside colleagues in health and residential care, need government guidance on personal protective equipment (PPE) urgently. While some social work can be done via phone and teleconferencing, seeing in people in their homes is central to the social work task.

Social workers can see up to a dozen or more service users a day and, at the moment, there is a lack of even basic hand sanitiser, leaving social workers concerned for service user's safety and their own safety. Measures are being applied unevenly across different local authorities and workplaces and there is a need for clearer guidance that can be applied uniformly. There is also an urgent need for essential guidance on safety for home visits during the pandemic.

2. **Priority Groups for Testing**

Social workers should be included in the list of priority groups for coronavirus testing. Many teams are depleted because colleagues need to self-isolate. Vulnerable service users also need assurance that their social workers can visit them in their home without the risk of infection. Including social workers in the list for priority testing is thus essential for the provision of on-going services.

3. **Supporting social workers back into the workforce**

Alongside colleagues in health, the police and colleagues in other essential services we welcome the opportunity for social workers to re-enter the workforce. Many social workers who are currently out of the workforce are coming forward to help at this time of crisis. We will work closely with the regulators to support individuals re-entering the workforce.

4. Support to vulnerable groups

We recognise the need that many public health messages need to be aimed at the majority. But our concern as social workers is also with the minorities. For example, victims of domestic abuse who may be trapped with their abuser, undocumented migrants, asylum seekers and refugees whose first language is not English and may therefore miss crucial health guidance, the street homeless who may be unable to self- isolate. We know that a number of initiatives are already underway (e.g. the instruction to local authorities to house all street homeless by last weekend) and we welcome these. However, we need the government to redouble efforts with reaching out to these groups.

5. Communication

Across the country people are pulling together and making sacrifices to help save lives, none more so than health, social care and other professionals. Social workers are among those essential professionals. We were pleased to hear your Secretary of State for Health, Matt Hancock, pay tribute to social workers as he introduced the Coronavirus Bill in the House last week and we ask that Ministers where possible make direct reference to social work and social workers in their public addresses.

6. Conclusion

The British Association of Social Workers (BASW) will support the government in fighting Covid-19. BASW has expanded its activities greatly to respond to the crisis and to support the social work workforce on the ground. In a short letter like this we cannot address all the points we might like; however, we hope that identifying these key considerations is helpful.

Your Government has led the way in a robust response to this crisis, and we will continue supporting these efforts as the professional association representing social workers across UK. For social workers to do their work efficiently and compassionately they must be safe, we therefore look forward to receiving guidance on PPE, followed by the necessary equipment.

Yours sincerely,

Personal Data

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CEO BASW

Personal Data

Geraldine Nosowska
BASW Chair