

WHAT'S HAPPENING.

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CRISIS IN SOCIAL WORK REVEALED BY NEW UNISON SURVEY



Social workers say they are no longer able to do their jobs effectively because of years of repeated cuts that have created a crisis in the sector, according to a survey published by UNISON last month.

The survey found an overwhelming number (95%) felt they could not perform their jobs properly due to the combined effects of reduced services and the social conditions created by austerity.

Eight out of ten social workers say they're forced to work unpaid overtime simply to keep their services going and fewer than one in five (17%) say their workload is manageable.

UNISON says the survey of more than 1,000 social workers shows the devastating effects of the government's cost-cutting, as key community services are now barely effective. Ministers must act to put more money into local government before it's too late, says the union.

Austerity is making it harder for councils to intervene in cases early which means families can be at a crisis point before social workers become involved. And the effects of financial misery caused by changes to the benefits system have made even more people vulnerable, says UNISON.

According to the survey:

- More than half (56%) are thinking of leaving for jobs that would be less stressful.
- One in four (25%) social workers are working more than seven hours overtime each week.
- Eight in ten social workers (80%) say local people aren't receiving the help and support they need at the right time.
- More than two thirds (68%) of social workers say jobs have been cut in their department in the past two years.
- Nearly two thirds (63%) say that the council is not delivering quality services.
- Four fifths (80%) are regularly working beyond their contracted hours.
- More than nine in ten (92%) say budget cuts have let to staff morale plummeting.

UNISON general secretary Dave Prentis said: "Social workers are dealing with the most vulnerable in society. When they say there are problems we all need to listen, and the government especially.

"These are skilled and dedicated staff who care passionately about helping families in difficult circumstances. It adds further to their stress and anxiety if they feel people down.

"A culture driven by targets and financial needs, combined with unmanageable workloads and financial cuts is creating problems that could tear apart communities, and put vulnerable children at risk.

"There is a crisis in social work after almost a decade of cuts to local government. Ministers must act before the system and the people it cares for are damaged beyond repair."

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Quotes from the survey respondents:

"If we treated people with broken legs like we treat people with broken minds there would be a national outcry. It is an utter scandal" – social worker, Leeds.

"We are now making decisions based on what we have available or can afford, rather than what a child needs or stalling where possible to allow a child to reach an age where they no longer qualify for a service" – social worker, Crossmichael, Scotland.

"We struggle to deliver vital services to young children and families because of the cuts. Nurseries are closing down, contact centres are shutting. There is a complete lack of venues to do direct work with families" – social worker, Worsley, north west England.

You can access the report [here](#)