

First Minister Humza Yousaf  
The Scottish Government

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## **Congratulations on your appointment from Social Work Scotland's Convenor**

Dear First Minister,

On behalf of Scotland's Chief Social Work Officers, and the wider Social Work Scotland (SWS) membership, our sincere congratulations on your recent appointment.

Clearly, you have the political power to make a real difference by acting now. In that respect, we together share a common interest in solving the challenges that our communities face. While Scotland can justifiably be proud of its policy and legislative framework, it is simply not right that at this current time, people are losing their human rights and are locked in poverty; struggling to stay afloat. We remain absolutely certain that we can help you to implement what evidence tells us can work, and together we can improve the wellbeing of citizens and giving meaning to people's rights. We believe that change is possible, and social work as a profession has the skills and knowledge to support the changes we want to see. Securing socially significant change for Scotland, requires a necessary and fundamental shift in both investing in Scotland's social work and social care services and in nurturing and promoting our incredible workforce.

Those services, made up of tens of thousands of skilled and committed professionals, are now unfortunately in an extremely fragile condition. Indeed, many social workers would describe 2023 as being significantly more challenging than during the COVID-19 pandemic. Social work and social care are trapped in a spiral of decline, haemorrhaging experienced staff, which in turn increases workloads on those that remain, which prompts further and additional early exits from the workforce. Social Work Scotland's leaders believe and remain of the view that you have the power to change that.

We know what is needed, but we need your help to do it. Taking immediate and substantial action can arrest this decline in these services, and place social work and social care on a path to recovery, stability and improvement, supporting people out of poverty and strengthening everyone's chance to thrive. The action needed includes development, at speed, of the National Social Work Agency, irrespective of what plans are agreed for the National Care Service. It also includes investment in a suite of initiatives, already identified by your officials, that are designed to improve routes into social work and social care professions.

Change is possible, and we need to act now. As social work and social care are eroded, the impact is being felt in your constituencies every day. Social work plays a central, and vital role in assessing people's needs and advocating for people; with fewer social workers, rising caseloads and increasing demand, people's rights are not being realised, their wellbeing is undermined, and they are less safe. Risk for individuals, families and communities is increasing. With that of course, the prospect of yet more drastic 'failure demand' and expensive interventions at a later date will remain the ongoing threat. We've been there before and no one in Scotland wants to go back to it. You now have the power to break that cycle, by using our practice, wisdom and experience.

The previous Cabinet acknowledged the seriousness of the situation, but tangible measures have, so far, been limited and piecemeal; consequently with little impact on outcomes. Social Work Scotland, and our partners the Scottish Association of Social Work, are ready and eager to work with you and your officials to develop a package commensurate with the scale of this crisis. The first critical step however, respectfully rests with your new Cabinet. A public acknowledgement of the crisis within social work and social care from you as First Minister and a commitment to do what it takes to secure and to rebuild the services and support for Scotland's communities that remains essential.

The fact of our workforce being heard, and their lived experience acknowledged, will, I know, make a real difference to social work and social care staff.

Our workforce are critical to the successes that you seek. Our workforce are the people on which the Scottish Government's Promise to Scotland's care experienced population depends. They are the people that hold the key to prevention and early intervention, alleviating the pressure on acute health services. They remain professionals, fundamentally committed to the realisation of your priorities, including reducing drug deaths and expanding community justice.

Social Work Scotland knows that making social work and social care workforce issues the priority, can provide the necessary tools for wider public sector reform and the opportunity to secure better outcomes and promote social justice.

Our leadership has dates in the calendar for meetings with a number of Cabinet Secretaries and Ministers and the Social Work Scotland team and I look forward to meeting with you and taking forward the debate and the necessary actions. Again, we reiterate our very best wishes and hope to engage you and the new Cabinet in not only developing the conversation, but more importantly in starting a new partnership to collectively address the challenges that lie ahead.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mike Burns". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping flourish at the end.

Mike Burns, Convenor  
Social Work Scotland

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