Ending homelessness in Wales: A resilient and valued workforce

A report from the Ending Homelessness National Advisory Board

October 2025



Contents

Introduction: A workforce commitment to underpin the ambition to end homelessness 3

Fair pay for homelessness and housing support workers in Wales 8

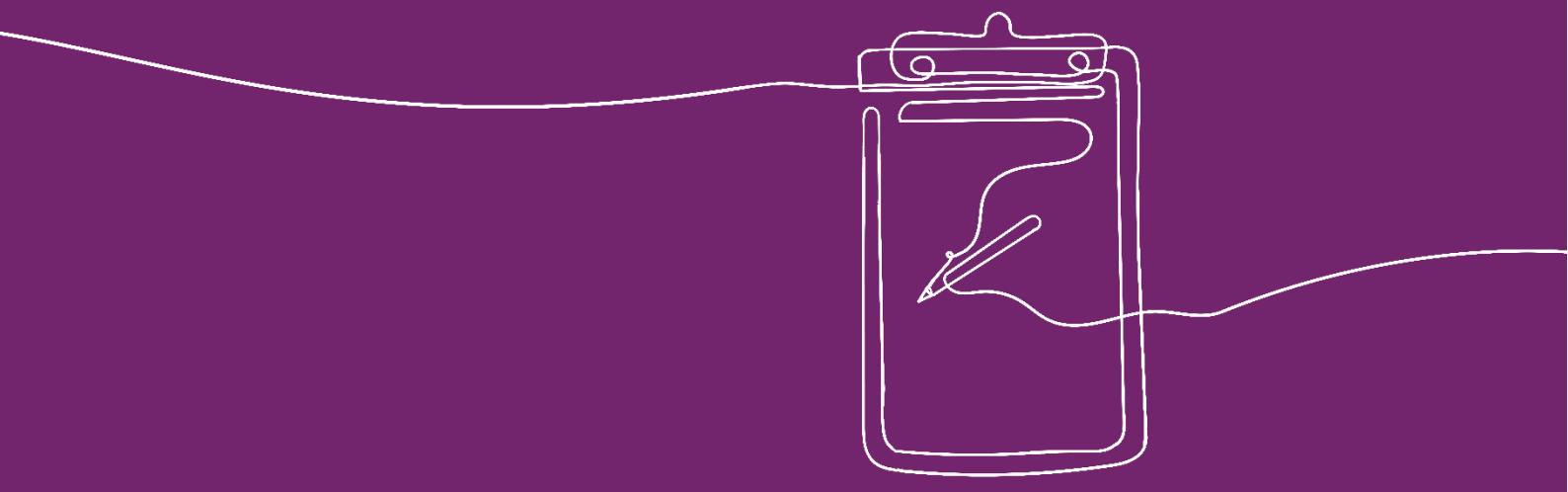
Support systems for homelessness and housing support workers in Wales 17

Training and qualifications for homelessness and housing support workers in Wales 26

Commissioning to create a resilient and valued workforce 38

Appendix 1: Developing a resilient and valued workforce: Views from Frontline Network Wales 47

Introduction: A workforce commitment to underpin the ambition to end homelessness



1. Policy background

1.1. The Welsh Government established a Fair Work Commission in 2018, which published its report in 2019. The Welsh Labour manifesto for the 2021 Senedd election committed to 'progress the Fair Work Commission's recommendations and make Wales a genuinely Fair Work Nation'. Following the election, the new Welsh Government published its Programme for Government, which committed to building an economy based on the principles of fair work and progressing the Fair Work Commission's recommendations. The Welsh Government has since published guidance on Fair Work.

1.2. In 2021, the Welsh Government also published its Ending Homelessness Action Plan, which committed to 'Develop a resilient and valued workforce recognised for their expertise', in recognition that the workforce is critical to delivering the ambition to end homelessness. This was reinforced by the inclusion of this commitment as one of the six strategic outcomes in the Ending Homelessness Outcomes Framework. The Ending Homelessness National Advisory Board established a Workforce Task and Finish Group to progress work on this issue and develop recommendations for the Board and Ministers. Frontline homelessness and housing support workers' views were collected and considered by the group, leading to a series of workstreams focused on pay, support, training and qualifications, recruitment and retention, and commissioning. The findings and recommendations emerging from these workstreams have led to the development of a vision for creating a 'resilient and valued workforce'.

1.3. In the summer of 2024, the Welsh Government's Knowledge and Analytical Services Housing research team published the Ending Homelessness Outcomes Framework: Workforce Survey report, which feeds into Chapter 6 of the Baseline report (Strategic Outcome 4: A resilient and valued homelessness and housing support workforce recognised for their expertise). The data in this report provides valuable feedback supporting the need to develop and deliver actions to provide a workforce which feels valued and supported.

2. Workforce Task and Finish Group

2.1. In March 2020 the Homelessness Action Group published its second report on the framework of policies, approaches and plans to end homelessness in Wales. The report made a number of recommendations to the Welsh Government, including:

- Appropriate pay and recognition of competencies
- Greater job security and career opportunities
- Better / accredited training through the development of national occupational standards
- Sufficient time and resource for professional supervision, therapeutic support and reflection, including a programme to address and prevent vicarious trauma (including processes to debrief staff after serious incidents)

2.2. This was followed by the publication of the Welsh Government's Ending Homelessness Action Plan, which includes the following action:

> ***Develop a resilient and valued workforce recognised for their expertise***
>
> *WG will commission work to develop with partners a workforce recruitment, training and development framework for homelessness and housing support staff. This work will promote the sector as a career and explore how we establish a psychologically informed approach across housing services. The framework will highlight how we influence cultures across governance, funding and commissioning structures as well as front line teams in the sector.*

2.3. At the end of 2021, the Ending Homelessness National Advisory Board established a Workforce Task and Finish Group to advise Welsh Government on how to implement the Homelessness Action Group's workforce-related recommendations. This group is chaired by ClwydAlyn Chief Executive Clare Budden, supported by the Welsh Government's Housing Policy Division, and includes representatives from local government and providers of homelessness and housing support services in Wales.

2.4. The Workforce Task and Finish Group wanted to ensure that its work was rooted in the experiences of frontline workers. At the first meeting, members decided that Cymorth Cymru should engage with frontline workers through the Frontline Network Wales. During December, Cymorth held six online meetings for frontline workers to share their views on workforce challenges and compiled a report for the Workforce Task and Finish Group (Appendix 1). This report was considered at the group's third meeting and informed the workstreams that were established to develop recommendations for the Ending Homelessness National Advisory Board.

2.5. The Workforce Task and Finish Group established five sub groups to focus on specific elements of the Homelessness Action Group's recommendations.

- Pay
- Support for staff
- Recruitment and retention
- Training and qualifications
- Commissioning

2.6. Four of these sub groups produced reports that include recommendations for the Welsh Government and other stakeholders. These exist as individual chapters within this final report. The fifth sub group, focused on recruitment and retention, published a good practice report to support the sector, which has not been included in this report.

Scope of report

2.7. The homelessness and housing support workforce is large and varied in its nature. While the majority of roles are funded by the Housing Support Grant, a vital part of the workforce is funded by the Homelessness Prevention Grant and the Revenue Support Grant. There are other important roles funded and co-funded by other sources, particularly those that support young people, people with a learning disability, refugees and asylum seekers, and survivors of violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence.

2.8. Frontline workers and organisations funded by the Housing Support Grant, Homelessness Prevention Grant, and the Revenue Support Grant have all been involved in the development of this report and its recommendations, through membership of the group and its subgroups, engagement events and surveys. However, there are some parts of this report, such as the chapter on pay, which have relied predominantly on data from services funded by the Housing Support Grant. There are others, such as the training and qualifications chapter, which have mainly considered 'support worker' roles funded by the Housing Support Grant and Homelessness Prevention Grant, rather than more specialist roles such as housing advice workers. However, the principles of fair pay, supporting staff, and the provision of good quality and appropriate training should apply to all roles across the sector.

2.9. This report covers a very wide range of issues and the majority of its recommendations should apply to the whole workforce. However, we have considered where grant programmes and funding streams can be used by the Welsh Government to deliver the required changes to better recognise and support the workforce. We have tried to be clear

where the recommendations apply to specific grant programmes or funding streams, and where recommendations apply to the wider workforce.

3. A commitment to underpin the ambition to end homelessness

The commitment required from the Welsh Government

3.1. A resilient and valued workforce is essential if Wales is to achieve the ambition to end homelessness. This report sets out a path to delivering this, and asks for the following commitment from the Welsh Government:

3.2. To achieve a resilient and valued homelessness and housing support workforce where people are:

- Fairly rewarded for the skilled, life-changing work they undertake
- Supported to thrive within a safe, healthy, inclusive, psychologically-informed working environment
- Secure in their roles, supported to develop and able to progress
- Recognised, respected and listened to by employers, public services and government

3.3. Delivery of this commitment will ensure that the workforce is recognised and valued for the work it does; and this is a key requisite for achieving the Welsh Government ambition and policy objectives to ensure that homelessness is rare, brief and un-repeated, and make the transformational shift to rapid rehousing.

Specific priorities to achieve the commitment

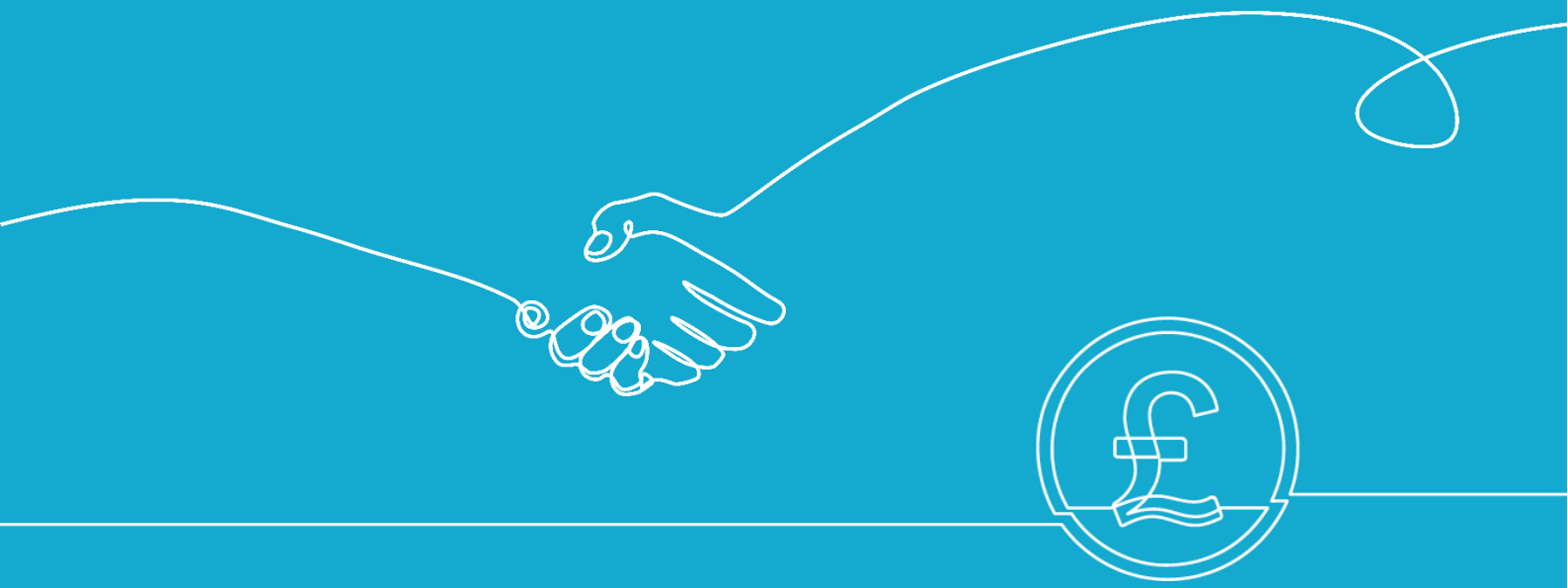
3.4. The following priorities are predicated on services being commissioned on a full-cost recovery basis, with adequate funding for fair pay, staffing costs, reflective practice, staff support and training:

- **Fair reward:** Commence work before the end of this Senedd term to establish a pathway to fair pay for homelessness and housing support workers, with the aim of achieving pay in line with roles of comparable intensity, complexity and skills (~£30k in line with the findings in the report on pay) by the end of the next Senedd term. This should include maintaining appropriate differentials and be achieved through funding settlements, grant terms and conditions, policy/commissioning guidance, and reporting mechanisms. Immediate action should be taken to ensure the Real Living Wage is fully funded and delivered in all commissioned homelessness and housing support services.
- **Support:** Ensure all staff can work in a safe, healthy, psychologically informed and inclusive work environment. This includes embedding and ensuring access to reflective practice and providing appropriate support for staff to maintain wellbeing and deal with the impact of vicarious trauma and traumatic incidents. This will be achieved through funding settlements, grant terms and conditions, policy/commissioning guidance, and reporting mechanisms to ensure local authorities provide sufficient funding and time for this in commissioned contracts.
- **Security:** Provide greater job security and certainty around length of employment; enabling people to plan their lives. This will be achieved through setting indicative budgets for the Housing Support Grant and Homelessness Prevention Grant for the life of a government term, providing greater certainty and confidence to set longer term contracts for commissioners and providers.
- **Progression:** Enable opportunity for growth and progression through the development of a skills and recognition framework for the homelessness and housing sector which includes a career pathway and opportunities to undertake training, coaching and

qualifications to enable the workforce to transition to a rapid rehousing approach. This will be supported by funding settlements, grant terms and conditions, policy/commissioning guidance, and reporting mechanisms to ensure local authorities provide the funding and time for this in commissioned contracts.

- **Recognition:** Continue to listen to, and engage with, frontline workers in the development of policy and legislation. Recognise the important roles these workers play in the prevention of homelessness and across a wide range of public policy areas, and promote this within government and externally.

Fair pay for homelessness and housing support workers in Wales



4. Introduction

4.1. Evidence collected over the last few years has consistently shown that low pay has led to frontline homelessness and housing support workers being pushed closer to poverty, with many struggling to pay their rent and bills, and some being at risk of homelessness themselves.

4.2. As well as the impact on individual members of staff, low pay has also led to high levels of staff turnover, with people being able to find higher paid, and often less stressful, work in other sectors. This has a significant impact on organisations that have invested in the recruitment and training of staff. It also has a negative impact on people using services, who often find it difficult to build trust and can find staff turnover unsettling and distressing.

4.3. It is important to point out that support providers would like to pay support workers a much higher wage, but funding constraints and commissioning processes have made this very difficult.

Evidence of low pay

4.4. In January 2023, Cymorth Cymru surveyed over 600 frontline homelessness and housing support workers about the impact of the cost-of-living crisis on their lives. The data showed:

- 86% said they were not putting on the heating in order to save money
- 56% were struggling to pay bills
- 18% were struggling to pay their rent
- 12% were feeling at greater risk of homelessness

4.5. In December 2023 Cymorth Cymru and Community Housing Cymru collected evidence from homelessness and housing support services about the wage levels in the sector. The evidence indicated that:

- 41% were being paid below the upcoming National Minimum Wage (due to come into force in April 2024)
- 67% were being paid below the Real Living Wage

4.6. In 2025, the Frontline Network's survey found that 53% of respondents from Wales have taken on additional paid work to cover living costs, and only 23% agree their pay adequately covers living expenses.

Recent steps to improve pay

4.7. Following a campaign to improve frontline worker pay in the lead up the Welsh Government's Final Budget for 2024/25, an uplift of £13m was secured for the Housing Support Grant. The Minister for Climate Change wrote to local authorities and directed them to utilise this uplift to increase frontline staff wages.

> *"This increase equates to a c7.8% increase on 'core' HSG funding of £166,763,000 and I have allocated this additional funding with the very clear expectation that this should be used to address pay pressures in the first instance, and assist commissioners in supporting providers to deliver on our broader commitment to Fair Work and the Real Living Wage."*

4.8. There was a recognition that the £13m uplift would not be enough to ensure that all workers could be paid the Real Living Wage (RLW), however this was viewed as an important first step that needed to be built on in subsequent years.

4.9. In a survey of support providers receiving funding from the Housing Support Grant, conducted in October 2024, 91% reported that they were paying the RLW, however 79% were not receiving the funding required and were therefore having to subsidise the RLW with income from other sources.

4.10. The Welsh Government's budget for 2025/26 included a £21million uplift for the Housing Support Grant, which is hugely welcomed by the sector. Ministers have specified that this was allocated to 'assist commissioners to support the sector in meeting increased costs, such as paying the Real Living Wage and to assist in meeting increased demand and complexity'. However, the changes to employer National Insurance contributions announced in the UK Government's Autumn Statement are likely to swallow up much of the £21million.

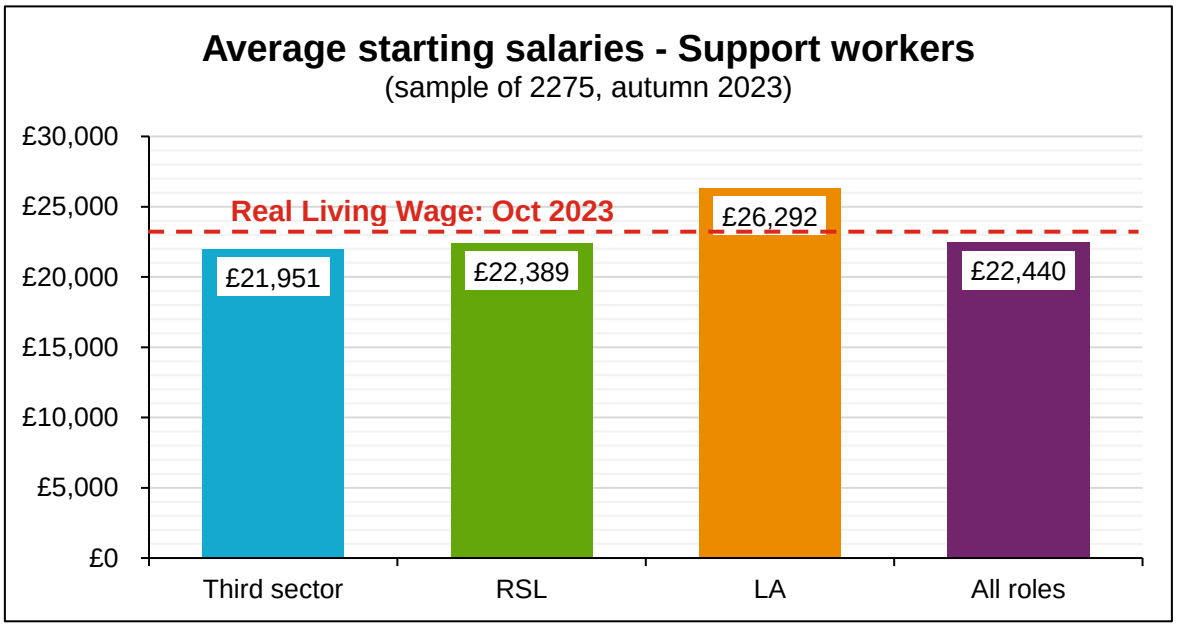
5. Data collection: Homelessness and housing support workforce

5.1. During the autumn of 2023, salary data on the homelessness and housing support workforce was collected from third sector support providers, housing associations and local authorities. The majority of the data is likely to be from roles funded by the Housing Support Grant, but the instructions accompanying the survey encouraged organisations to include roles with a similar remit which are funded by other sources, such as the Homelessness Prevention Grant and the Revenue Support Grant.

5.2. The majority of the data relates to roles that could be described as 'support worker' roles. Data was limited for other types of roles and this report therefore focuses predominantly on the data and recommendations for support worker pay.

6. Support worker wages

6.1. Data on support worker wages was obtained from 19 third sector support providers, 10 housing associations and 9 local authorities. In total, the data represented 2275 jobs across the sector. The average starting salary was found to be £22,446, with variations between the average salaries paid by third sector providers, housing associations and local authorities (see graph below). For context, on the 23rd October 2023, the Real Living Wage outside of London was announced as £12 per hour, which equates to £23,088, based on a 37-hour working week.

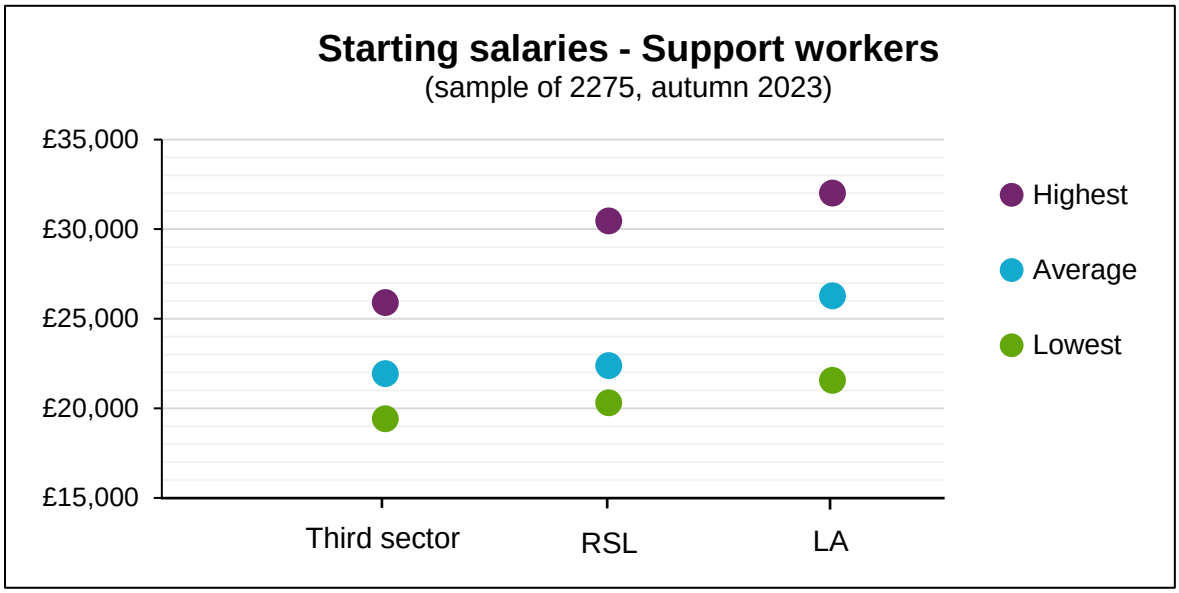


6.2. The following table and graph show the variation in lowest, highest and average salaries, depending on which type of organisation is running the service.

	Third sector	RSL	LA	All roles
Highest starting salary	£25,916	£30,471	£32,020	£32,020
Average starting salary	£21,951	£22,389	£26,292	£22,440
Lowest starting salary	£19,432	£20,319	£21,575	£19,432

6.3. The data shows that the lowest salaries are in the third sector, where organisations are likely to receive the majority of their funding from the housing support grant, and are therefore restricted in what they are able to pay by the funds and requirements set out during the commissioning process. The pay within housing associations is marginally higher, where salaries may still be restricted by the funding available through the commissioning process, but can be subsidised by income from other parts of the organisation. The salaries are highest for support worker roles within local authorities. This reinforces anecdotal evidence from third sector support providers, who report that they sometimes lose staff to equivalent roles in the local authority, which pay a higher salary.

6.4. The graph below also shows the range in salaries, depending on the type of organisation, with the third sector being more restricted in what it can afford to pay, compared to RSLs and local authorities. This graph also shows that highest salary level within the RSL data is an outlier, with the average being much closer to the lowest salary.



7. Salaries for comparative roles

7.1. As well as analysing data within the homelessness and housing support sector, we also wanted to provide a comparison to similar roles within and outside of the housing sector.

7.2. Firstly, it is an important point of principle that homelessness and housing support workers should receive equitable recognition and reward for the jobs they undertake. Secondly, any disparity in wages can have a negative impact on recruitment and retention, and therefore on the quality and continuity of service delivery. Keeping the same support worker can be extremely important to people who have experienced trauma and been failed by services in the past, and retaining an experienced staff member can be invaluable for such complex and challenging roles. Unfortunately, it is common for the homelessness and housing

support sector to lose valuable staff members, who they have trained and invested in, to better paid roles in housing or other public services.

Housing association roles

7.3. During September and October 2024, Community Housing Cymru conducted a survey of salaries within the social housing sector. Thirty housing associations provided data.

7.4. We have identified roles within this data set that are likely to be of the same level of seniority as a support worker. However, it should be noted that these roles are unlikely to face the same level of intensity, complexity and crisis on a day-to-day basis, or the requirement to regularly work unsocial hours, compared to homelessness and housing support workers.

Job title	Department	Average salary
Community Safety Officer / Advisor	Community Services	£34,617
Officer (Community Services)	Community Services	£32,609
Tenant Officer	Community Services	£31,788
Mentor / coach	Community Services	£28,819
Advisor / coach	Financial inclusion	£31,294
Officer (Financial Inclusion)	Financial inclusion	£34,011
Officer	Financial inclusion	£34,011
Housing Officer	Housing Services	£32,321

7.5. The average salary for the roles featured in the table above is £32,434.

7.6. While this data was collected approximately one year after the data in the previous section of this report, there is a significant difference of around £10,000 between the average support worker starting salary and the salaries in the table above.

Roles in other public services

7.7. We analysed data sourced from the Indeed jobs website in January 2025, by identifying Wales-based roles that appeared to be similar in nature and seniority to homelessness and housing support workers.

7.8. We sought to exclude clinical / nursing roles and roles that explicitly required a formal qualification to apply for the roles.

Job title	Organisation type	Salary
Youth Justice Practitioner	Local authority	£35,235 - £39,513
Prison Resettlement Keyworker	Third sector	£23,000 - £24,000
Support Officer	HMCTS	£24,202
Victim Support Specialist Support Caseworker	Third sector	£26,010
Prison Support Role	HMPPS	£27,840
Residential Recovery and Intervention Officer	Local authority	£28,770 - £31,364
Probation Services Officer	HMPPS	£26,475 - £31,650
Housing Solutions Assessment Officer	Local authority	£31,586 - £35,235
Criminal Justice / Substance Use Practitioner	G4S	£24,500 - £27,825

Care and Support Worker	Local authority	£27,711 - £29,572
Social Work Assistant – Planned Care	Local authority	£30,559 - £32,654
Social Worker – Mental Wellbeing	Local authority	£34,314 - £39,513
Young person / edge of care support worker	Local authority	£27,269 - £31,067
Social Work Assistant	Local authority	£31,067 - £35,235
Senior Mental Health Support Worker	Third sector	£34,000 - £36,000
Peer Support Development Worker	Health Board	£30,420 - £37,030
Mental Health Wellbeing Transition Officer	Further education	£26,842 - £29,380
Community Mental Health Support Worker	Local authority	£27,269 - £30,060
Welfare Support Officer	Unclear	£28,917
Support Worker - Care Leaving Service	Independent sector	£24,440 - £32,708
Health Care Assistant - Mental Health	Health Board	£24,433 - £26,060
Hoarding Support Worker	Third sector	£30,000
Senior Mental Health and Wellbeing Coach	Unclear	£34,586
Mental Health Caseworker	Third sector	£25,584

7.9. The average starting salary for the roles featured in the table above is £28,543. Although the data was collected around seventeen months after the support worker data, the difference is still significant, at over £6,000.

Conclusion

7.10. The data above provides a useful comparison and illustrates that support workers are paid significantly less than their counterparts in the housing sector and other related public and third sector services. This supports the anecdotal evidence from the homelessness and housing support sector that they are losing staff to better paid roles in other parts of the housing sector or other public services. This comes at a cost to the organisation – in terms of recruitment costs and the cost of training staff who then take their skills elsewhere – as well as risking the quality and continuity of service delivery.

8. Management roles

8.1. As well as data relating to support worker roles, the research also included data on more senior roles within homelessness and housing support services. As expected, the sample size for senior roles was much smaller, with 292 roles across 14 third sector providers, 10 housing associations and 7 local authorities.

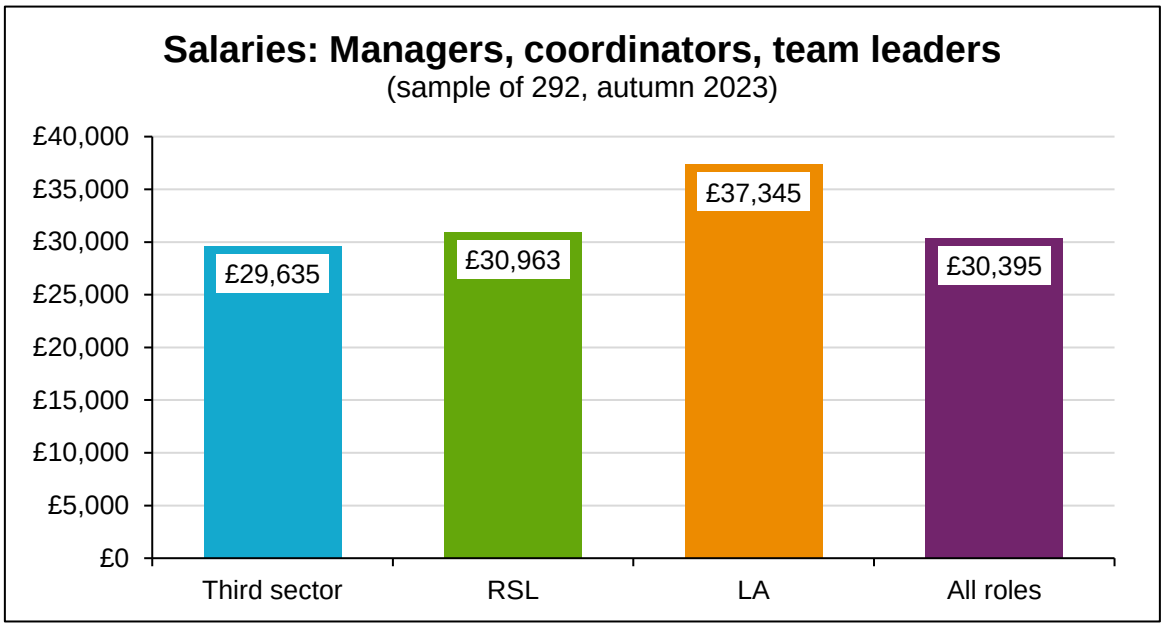
8.2. In addition, there were significant variations in the roles in this category, due to different organisational sizes and structures. Those organisations working within just one local authority area have a very different structure to those working across a large number of local authorities. Equally, organisations solely dedicated to providing support are likely to have their management structure heavily influenced by the amount of funding available through the HSG, whereas organisations providing a broader range of services may well subside management roles to enable them to align with salary structures across the organisation.

8.3. Most of the roles included appeared to be responsible for managing a team, service or project. However, there were some roles that appeared to be more senior roles within organisations.

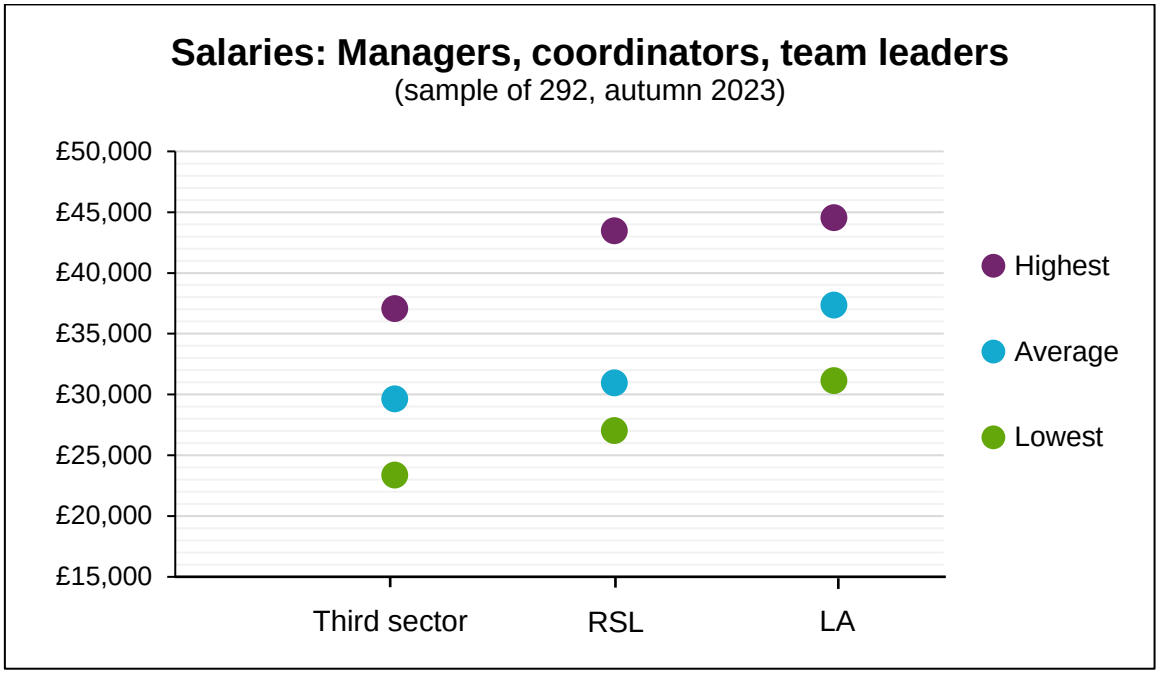
8.4. Roles included: Project Manager, Team Leader, Assistant Service Manager, Deputy Service Manager, Programme Manager, Housing Services Manager, Support Services Manager, Housing First Project Coordinator, Manager, Service Manager, Service Coordinator, Supported Housing Manager, Supported Housing Coordinator, Refuge Coordinator, Operations Manager, Scheme Manager, Wellbeing Support Manager, Coordinator, Housing Support Manager, Housing Support Coordinator, Homelessness Prevention Team Manager, Housing First Team Manager, Temporary Accommodation Team Leader, Housing Options Team Leader, Housing Support Team Leader

8.5. It is therefore difficult to make recommendations about salaries above support worker level. However, we have included the data for information.

8.6. Again, the data shows that the lowest salaries can be found in the third sector, with marginally higher salaries in housing associations, and the highest within local authorities.



	Third sector	RSL	LA	All roles
Highest salary	£37,070	£43,460	£44,539	£44,539
Average salary	£29,635	£30,432	£37,345	£30,253
Lowest salary	£23,363	£27,018	£31,151	£23,363



Differentials

8.7. Given the significant variation in salaries at a team leader or manager level, we decided that it was extremely difficult to make recommendations about the level of manager pay. The different sizes and structures of organisations mean that there is unlikely to be a consistent approach.

8.8. However, one area that we believed deserved further consideration was the importance of maintaining differentials between frontline workers and their direct managers. This is key to ensuring that people are encouraged to take on further responsibility and challenge within an organisation, and really important in providing a career pathway and retaining good quality staff.

8.9. The table below shows the difference between the average support worker pay and average manager pay taken from the data. Aside from the local authority data, the average differential appears to be ~35% of the support worker salary.

	Third sector	RSL	LA	All roles
Average support worker salary	£21,951	£22,389	£26,292	£22,440
Average manager / coordinator salary	£29,635	£30,432	£37,345	£30,253
Difference (£)	£7,684	£8,043	£11,053	£7,813
Difference (%)	35%	36%	42%	35%

8.10. If work progresses to increase frontline worker pay in line with the recommendations within this report, then consideration should be given to whether a consistent approach to maintaining differentials should be adopted.

9. Recommendations

9.1. Following consideration of the data outlined in this report, the following recommendations have been agreed by the Workforce Task and Finish Group.

9.2. While the recommendations make specific reference to the Housing Support Grant and the Homelessness Prevention Grant, the Welsh Government should ensure parity for related roles that are funded by other parts of the Welsh Government, such as those related to supporting refugees and asylum seekers, and survivors of violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence. The Welsh Government should also be mindful of roles that are funded by multiple sources, and work with other Welsh Government departments to ensure that the approach to fair pay is replicated across relevant funding streams.

Short term: 2025-26

9.3. Further evidence should be collected from homelessness and housing support providers and commissioners to assess the extent to which the Real Living Wage is a) being paid and b) is fully funded through the Housing Support Grant or Homelessness Prevention Grant.

9.4. The Welsh Government and local authority commissioners should ensure that all homelessness and housing support workers have the funding required to pay the Real Living Wage as a minimum during 2026/27.

9.5. The Welsh Government should ensure that this expectation is built into relevant guidance and grant terms and conditions.

9.6. Commissioners should ensure that this expectation is built into contracts.

9.7. Evidence that this is being delivered should be collected from homelessness and housing support providers and commissioners during the first half of 2026/27.

Medium term: Next five years

9.8. Given the complexity of work undertaken by homelessness and housing support workers, the Welsh Government should set out a pathway to a more significant increase in wages over the next five years. The wage levels should be comparable to roles undertaking similar levels of complex work, such as those outlined in chapter 4 (i.e. £28,500-£32,400 plus inflation).

9.9. This should include plans for:

- additional funding to ensure that pay can be increased without reducing service provision
- a commitment to enforcing this through Welsh Government guidance and grant terms and conditions
- ensuring that commissioning processes reflect a new minimum rate of pay for homelessness and housing support workers
- eradicating the disparity between pay in commissioned vs in-house services.
- an expectation that differentials for immediate managers are set at an appropriate rate

9.10. This work should be aligned with the recommendations in the Workforce Task and Finish Group on training and qualifications, which proposes to set out a skills and training framework that supports the recognition and progression of staff within the homelessness and housing support sector.

Support systems for homelessness and housing support workers in Wales



10. Introduction

10.1. The homelessness and housing support workforce do incredibly complex work in extremely challenging circumstances, supporting people with experience of trauma, domestic abuse, exploitation, mental health and substance use problems, helping them to navigate complex housing and welfare systems and legislation, and often being the one person that they can rely on.

10.2. Supporting people who have or are experiencing homelessness is emotionally challenging work and many staff members report that it can often be traumatising. The evidence suggests that there is not enough support available to frontline workers across the housing and homelessness support sector. Nor are the resources available to affect meaningful change to this situation.

10.3. The following quotes from frontline homelessness and housing support workers illustrate the impact on their mental health and wellbeing, and evidence the need for better support:

"This job is harder and more emotionally draining - keeps you up at night."

"I don't want to be here so long that I don't care but I'm waking up at 3am because I'm worried about the people we are trying to support, it is a tremendous strain."

"I'm having some kind of therapy at the moment, because I'm having panic attacks, my work load is off the scale, I know I have the knowledge and skills to do the job, but not the resources."

"Case load has doubled since Covid, really stressful [...] I do enjoy the job but the stressful side has caused the panic attacks."

Case Study

8.30am 13th August 2022 - HB, support worker was lone working on Saturday and had reason to believe that one of the clients was adversely affected by a substance. In line with organisational procedure, he carried out observations on the client concerned. At approximately 10.05am HB noticed a marked deterioration in the client's presentation and administered Naloxone which brought the client round, but breathing was still an issue so HB called the emergency services for an ambulance. The call handler advised HB to remain with the client, which he did. At 11.36 HB phoned for an update on the ambulance he was advised that the call was high priority, and he was first on the list but was still looking at 2-5 hour wait for assistance. At 13.58pm, HB phoned again to inform the emergency services of a change in presentation and that the client was now vomiting brown coffee like liquid and was advised by the call handler to put the client in the recovery position.

At 14.45 HB rang the emergency call handler again as the client had started to have a seizure. Whilst on the call the client went into cardiac arrest and HB was instructed to carry out CPR which he did for approx. 14 mins until an ambulance finally arrived. HB was asked to assist the paramedic with rescue breaths and compressions until Air Ambulance doctors arrived.

HB followed all processes and procedures correctly.

The client was declared deceased at 17.01hrs.

Support systems for staff workstream

10.4. The support systems for staff workstream aims to identify best practice and make recommendations to the Welsh Government to encourage and ensure that all frontline homelessness and housing support workers have the support they need to undertake their roles. This report recognises that a range of approaches are required to meet the needs of

workers who need different types of support, and is also cognisant of the variation in resources available to different types and sizes of organisations operating within the homelessness and housing support sector. The recommendations made by this workstream are therefore dependent on the commissioning environment, and must be supported by the implementation of recommendations made by the commissioning workstream.

10.5. The workstream was chaired by the Wallich CEO, Lindsey Cordery-Bruce, and involved representatives from the third sector, local government, and people with specific experience of supporting and delivering psychologically informed environments.

10.6. This report offers a short analysis, drawing from Welsh, sector-specific literature to identify themes and trends highlighting systemic deficits and calls for change. A range of options and suggested standards are provided to clearly define what good practice in this area could look like in Wales.

11. Thematic Analysis:

11.1. Thematic Analysis is a qualitative technique used to gain insights and interpretations from participant interviews and to enhance findings from questionnaire data. This is achieved by identifying similarities and differences in participants interpretations of shared experiences. More information about Thematic Analysis can be found here Thematic Analysis - an overview | ScienceDirect Topics

11.2. The following documents were analysed:

- Howard, E., & Williams, J. (2021) Workload and Wellbeing: An insight into the experience of operational staff during COVID-19. The Housing Support Network.
- Powell, M. (2022). Developing a resilient and valued workforce: Views from The Frontline Network Wales. Cymorth Cymru.
- Schneider, C., Hobson, C.W., & Shelton, K.H. (2021). Grounding PIE in the Sky: Laying empirical foundations for a Psychologically Informed Environment to enhance wellbeing and practice in a homeless organisation. Health and Social care in the Community: Wiley, 1-11.
- CIHC (2021) Joining the Dots Part 2. Local Government Housing Professionals Survey Report. Tyfu Tai Cymru.
- Kennett, J., & McCausland, K. (2022) Relationships between professional quality of life and workplace induced trauma. The Wallich. Unpublished.

Key Findings:

11.3. Key findings from the thematic review include:

- Most staff reported that they draw professional satisfaction from helping people, however if they are unable to help due to lack of housing, this is having a negative psychological impact
- Many cited overwork and increased cases
- Client mental health had worsened
- Increased antisocial behaviour and a higher exposure to danger
- “The job has got harder”
- Wages are low
- Mental health needs of staff have increased since COVID
- Working from home has benefits but can also lead to isolation
- It’s becoming harder to separate work and home

- Secondary traumatic stress is a significant indicator of burnout (but doesn't affect compassion satisfaction)
- The higher the satisfaction, the lower the burnout (even if secondary traumatic stress is present)
- Burnout and compassion fatigue lead to higher attrition and staff turnover
- Those with secondary traumatic stress can still empathise with clients
- Those with burnout are often unable to empathise with clients
- Deep motivation clashes with serious professional challenges. This leads to feelings of helplessness.
- Staff who need PIE interventions the most are the least likely to engage
- Exposure to client risk has gone up
- Feelings of helplessness because they are unable to find homes for people
- It seems higher paid roles have less stress – perceived as unfair
- Support work is traumatising!
- There is inconsistency of support for staff across organisations and regions
- Support workers may need tailored support (not just replica of NHS / Police models)
- HSG contracts and commissioning are not PIE
- There are things that can protect staff

Protective Factors:

11.4. While it is difficult to change the complexity and trauma within this work, it is important to consider the protective factors that are likely to support frontline workers:

- A strong organisational identity
- Compassion satisfaction
- Clinical supervision
- Reflective practice
- Training and qualifications
- A supportive manager and leaders
- A close knit team
- Fair pay and conditions
- Employment certainty

Key themes

- Things have got harder since COVID
- Feeling de-valued
- Hopelessness and frustration
- Deep compassion that has limits
- Psychologically informed environments – but not for staff
- No time to access support even if it was available
- Protective factors

Thematic Analysis Limitations:

11.5. It must be noted that the original data from the studies cited was not available for analysis and therefore, only reported findings were used. Lack of reporting made it impossible to ascertain demographic data. Although confidence is high that there is fair representation between local authority and third sector colleagues, there is a lack of hard data to support this assumption. Some participants may have taken part in more than one consultation and may, therefore be double counted.

12. Why support work is traumatising

12.1. There is strong evidence to suggest that people who embark on caring professions have similarities and patterns in their psychological profile. What is often observed, is that those who become care givers may not have received adequate care themselves while growing up. Neath & McCluskey (2019)[1] wrote extensively about the complex dynamic and paradoxes that arise between care givers and care receivers. When a care seeker's needs remain unmet, it is a natural coping mechanism to become a care giver to compensate for this loss. The result of this, is that professionals bring their own traumas, biases and beliefs into the care sector. This is not just common for caring professionals but part of our common humanity as people. There is a risk that professionals then unwittingly look to their work with clients to fulfil their own need for care and this must be carefully managed in a supportive environment. What decision makers must understand is that this brings additional risk and vulnerability to vicarious trauma. Like knocking the scab of an old injury, when our team members are exposed to trauma in work, it does more damage and hits them harder. The sector itself is traumatising. Whenever a serious incident happens, there is an investigation and scrutiny process, which if not handled sensitively, exacerbates feelings of guilt and shame. This unwittingly sabotages opportunities for healing and in some cases grieving.

12.2. When staff are under pressure and the fight or flight response is initiated, it is normal to look for the quickest way out of the situation without considering consequences or the feelings of others. Unfortunately, empathy is the first to suffer when a person is extremely stressed or experiencing trauma. We have a duty of care to change the way we support the workforce. The organisation's staff need to be both empathetic and compassionate to help others. Compassion is absolutely essential as a social justice drive to act on alleviating suffering. If a staff member is stressed and suffering, then they can't consider helping to alleviate others' suffering.

12.3. The ultimate long-term consequence is malpractice, blurring boundaries, desensitisation and complacency – risk increases. This is never intended but subconsciously creeps up on professionals and only comes to light when standards go down and mistakes are made.

12.4. "People who have had contradictory experiences of caregiving will often tend to miscue professional caregivers so that any attempt at caregiving is frustrated and can end up as a frustrating experience for both parties." Una McClusky

Case Study

The local authority temporary accommodation manager (J) was contacted by support staff to say that there were concerns about a person living in one of the dispersed accommodation units (K). The support worker hadn't heard from K for a while, he had missed appointments, and there were rumours on social media about what might have happened to him.

K was a former drug user but had been abstinent for a couple of years. He was estranged from his partner and children due to his previous drug use, but was working hard with the help of his support worker to make a difference.

When J attended the property, an ambulance had already been called and K had been taken away from the property. He was pronounced dead at the scene due to a drugs related death, later confirmed by the coroner.

[1] Neath, N., & McCluskey, U. (2019). To be met as a person at work – The effect of early attachment experiences on work relationships. Routledge:London.

J contacted the family and was mindful to relay the information to them in a compassionate and sympathetic way being conscious of his position representing the council.

J's staff were understandably shocked and saddened by this incident but have also become used to situations like this and have developed "a thick skin". J is thankful that he can "leave these things at the door" and can go for a run or play football to take his mind off them, but they do take their toll.

Case Study

X suffered sexual abuse for a period of two years from the age of eight, which has affected their life to the present day. They are 46. They have had periods of stability, but usually fall back into the same chaotic cycles of severe paranoia, hypervigilance, anxiety, depression, and relapses to using substances and/ or alcohol problematically. They have struggled to maintain any form of tenancy or supported housing as their feelings of persecution and paranoia usually end up in their belief a neighbour or other resident is plotting against them, the accommodation breaks down and they end up sleeping rough again.

X has been known to the organisation for over 10 years and has been in several of their projects or supported by outreach workers for most of this time. Within the last year they have made several suicide attempts which have resulted in police call outs and being seen by the crisis team where they have pleaded to be admitted for help. On one occasion that staff and police attended, X was told they won't get anywhere if they keep coming in out of hours. The situation is normally put down to their substance use and they are released within a few hours, and follow-up assistance has not happened due to this, or because X's lifestyle has made it difficult to attend if any further appointments are offered.

Most recently, X attempted suicide by climbing onto a church roof where they fell off, but fortunately were caught by a small wall that surrounded the roof. They were lowered unconscious from the roof by emergency services and admitted to hospital. X's memory of events was hazy due to the fall and level of intoxication, however they stated they had been attempting suicide. Whilst they were in hospital staff requested a MH assessment on X on three occasions and were told this would happen. X remined in hospital for 5 days after receiving an operation on their shattered ankle, then they were released without having a MH assessment. The staff team supporting X are left exasperated and fearful for his safety, with nowhere else to turn.

Implications for practice

12.5. The culmination of these pressures on our workforce has serious potential implications for practice and the level of service provided to people experiencing homelessness. Staff burnout can affect the warmth of the welcome people receive, the patience shown and the level of compassion they experience. If this is not up to standard, the underlying essential trusting relationship can be undermined, leaving both the worker and the client unfulfilled. Moreover, there are consequences for safeguarding as a result of widespread de-sensitisation across our sector. If a worker witnesses chaos and substantial trauma every day, there is a risk that this may become normalised. Scenarios that previously instigated an urgent response can be met with a higher level of risk tolerance over time. As workers become jaded they become reluctant to make onward referrals to responsible authorities because it seems that "nothing will happen anyway". This was emphasised in a recent report Mental Health on Hold report - The Wallich . Over time the continuum between risk aversion and risk tolerance becomes skewed. Subsequently the risk increases for those we support, for professions, for organisations, for society. This has the potential to endanger life.

12.6. The good news is that there are things we can do to protect our teams. This is why we need better support systems for staff.

13. Examples of good practice

Flintshire County Council: Creating time to heal

13.1. Following the publication of the report on staff wellbeing by the Housing Support Network, the Housing Solutions team at Flintshire County Council carried out further work. They built on the national survey by gathering the views of local staff regarding their wellbeing and resilience. Following on from the survey a staff wellbeing group was established to action some of the issues raised. Potential quick wins were identified including the instigation of clinical supervision. This provided staff with a safe space without managers present to have honest conversations about their practice and reflect and unburden.

13.2. Team building activities were trialled by the staff wellbeing group to provide an activity package that peers could engage with. This facilitated teams to come together and work together, developed relationships that could be built on in the working environment.

13.3. A management consultant was recruited to work with the team to develop the right culture. She met with managers to look at the findings from the local survey and discuss how change could be supported. A service specification was developed which focussed on values and behaviours and this will be used for all future recruitment. Further work is planned to expand on the values work with existing staff as it is recognised that values and culture impact on service delivery.

TRiM – Trauma Incident Management

13.4. Throughout the Prison service the TRiM model is used and supplied by independent professionals from March On Stress. If an officer is faced with a traumatising incident, they are assigned support within a few hours, taken off site and formally de-briefed. A package of support is then put in place depending on the needs and individuality of the person.

13.5. Trauma Risk Management (TRiM) is a peer-led process that seeks to identify and assess the psychological risk to individuals who have experienced trauma in the course of their work and, if necessary, signpost employees for further help to specialist professional support services when they may be at risk of psychological injury.

13.6. The aims of TRiM are

- To support the welfare needs of staff who are, or have been exposed to a potentially traumatic incident.
- To support managers in identifying staff who may be in need of additional welfare support at an early stage and to signpost them to specialist medical care, therefore reducing risk of illness developing in staff.
- To promote a healthy workforce and contribute towards reducing staff absence.
- To provide guidance regarding access to TRiM Practitioners.
- To provide TRiM Practitioners with guidance regarding the deployment and use of the TRiM risk assessment tools.
- To provide TRiM Managers with guidance in supporting TRiM Practitioners.

13.7. This approach received particularly strong recommendation from the Support Systems for Staff Subgroup.

Canopi

13.8. Canopi offers a free, confidential service that provides NHS and social care staff in Wales with access to various levels of mental health support.

13.9. They offer self-help, guided self-help, support from colleagues, and virtual face-to-face therapies with accredited specialists.

13.10. Canopi aims to provide support to those with acute symptoms such as those feeling overwhelmed and distressed or having difficulties managing the various challenges that the pandemic has brought; those developing symptoms of anxiety and depression, as well as longer-term effects such as Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

13.11. Discussions with the commissioners and leaders of the Canopi service releveled that their previous attempts to expand have been thwarted by a lack of suitably qualified professionals in Wales.

14. Recommendations

14.1. The following recommendations are ambitious and offer an honest appraisal of what could be achieved in Wales if the support needs of staff in the homelessness sector are prioritised. A priority must be to ensure staff have equal access to appropriate support even if they work for a small organisation, who may have been unable to attract resources from elsewhere.

Reflective Practice

14.2. Welsh Government to ensure that its policy, strategy and budget enables the provision of regular reflective practice for all frontline homelessness and housing support staff.

14.3. Local authorities to ensure that homelessness and housing support service specifications include the requirement and funding for all frontline staff to engage in regular reflective practice.

14.4. Welsh Government and local authorities to promote and foster a culture of reflection in the development of policy and the commissioning and review of services.

14.5. Homelessness and housing support providers ensure that all frontline staff are given the encouragement, time and support to engage in regular reflective practice.

14.6. Homelessness and housing support providers to promote and foster a culture of reflection throughout their organisation, including frontline staff, managers and Board, to encourage openness and continuous learning and improvement.

Psychological support

14.7. Welsh Government to ensure that its policy, strategy and budget enables the provision of appropriate psychological support for all relevant frontline homelessness and housing support staff.

14.8. Local authorities and support providers to develop a shared understanding of the level of psychological support needed for staff in specific types of services and in response to specific traumatic incidents.

14.9. Local authorities to ensure that homelessness and housing support service specifications include the requirement and funding for all relevant frontline staff to receive appropriate

psychological support to deal with ongoing vicarious trauma and specific traumatic incidents.

14.10. Homelessness and housing support providers ensure frontline staff are provided with appropriate psychological support to deal with ongoing vicarious trauma and specific traumatic incidents.

14.11. For Welsh Government to agree to commission a review of the availability of specialist trauma support services across Wales to identify any gaps in supply; and with an agreed timescale; to act on any reported shortfall by promoting/commissioning the development of market growth.

Employee wellbeing

14.12. Welsh Government to consider the expansion of the TRiM service to frontline homelessness and housing support staff in Wales. This could be delivered in multi agency model.

14.13. Homelessness and housing support providers to consider the appropriateness of their current employee assistance programmes and whether more tailored support can be provided to frontline staff.

14.14. For Welsh Government to ensure that there is equity of access to mental health support for staff working in the homelessness sector, regardless of the size or financial position of their organisation, by expanding Canopi services.

Training and qualifications for homelessness and housing support workers in Wales



15. Introduction

15.1. The homelessness and housing support workforce undertake highly complex, intensive and challenging work that requires a huge amount of knowledge and expertise across a wide range of areas, including support planning and delivery, risk management, housing legislation, the welfare system, safeguarding, mental health, substance use, violence against women, and much more. Every day, homelessness and housing support workers make a significant difference to people's lives and have a substantial impact on public services in Wales.

15.2. However, these workers do not always get the respect and recognition that they deserve, including from people working in other services. Frontline workers have told us that they are often regarded as 'just a support worker' and feel that their views and expertise are not valued and respected. There is also a sense that a lack of clear career pathway and specific accreditation and qualifications contributes to the lack of recognition and respect for people working in the homelessness and housing support sector.

"We're treated like we're bottom of the food chain – 'you're only a support worker'."

15.3. Individual organisations provide staff with comprehensive training during induction and throughout their time undertaking these roles, but there is no nationally agreed training framework that sets expectations about training for homelessness and housing support workers. In addition, the lack of specific qualifications for homelessness and housing support staff in Wales means that people who want to gain a qualification may undertake a general housing qualification or a health and social care qualification, neither of which fully reflects their roles.

Training and Qualification Workstream

15.4. The training and qualifications workstream has focused on providing recommendations to the Workforce Task and Finish Group about training and qualifications for frontline homelessness and housing support workers, working in projects funded by the Housing Support Grant. However, some of the recommendations may be relevant to similar roles funded by other sources.

15.5. This includes:

Training

- What core training should be included as part of the induction process to enable new staff to develop the confidence, knowledge and skills to deliver high quality homelessness and housing support services.
- What should be provided as part of the ongoing core training programme to enable staff to update their knowledge and continue developing their skills to deliver high quality homelessness and housing support services.
- What is required by Welsh Government, commissioners and/or support providers to enable the delivery of this training.

Qualifications

- Whether a qualification should be developed specifically for frontline homelessness and housing support workers in Wales.
- If a qualification is to be recommended, what should be the key considerations in the development of the qualification, and what should be the key components and the desired training/teaching/ learning process.

16. Training for homelessness and housing support workers

16.1. At the start of this process, Cymorth Cymru conducted a survey of frontline workers, via the Frontline Network Wales, and a similar survey of managers and commissioners. The surveys asked for views on training delivered as part of an organisation's induction process, as well as the ongoing training offered to staff.

16.2. There were 141 responses to the frontline worker survey and 39 responses from managers and commissioners.

Training as part of induction

16.3. In answer to the question 'What training do frontline homelessness and housing support staff in your organisation receive as part of their induction?' the majority of answers could be grouped into the following themes:

- Support processes and systems (support planning, risk assessments, outcomes)
- Support skills
- ACEs, PIE, trauma, restorative approaches
- Neurodiversity, mental health, substance use
- Abuse, violence, exploitation
- Housing law, policy and practice
- Welfare, finance, debt policy and practice
- Safeguarding
- Health and Safety
- Equality and diversity
- Data protection

16.4. The survey also asked respondents 'What is the most useful or important training courses or topics for frontline homelessness and housing support workers to receive as part of their induction?' The following table shows the answers grouped into themes, ranked in order of the most common topics mentioned by each respondent group. There was a lot of commonality between the answers given by frontline workers and managers / commissioners.

Frontline workers	Managers
1. Homelessness and housing law, policy, procedures and practice	1. ACEs, PIE, trauma
2. Mental health and substance use	2. Homelessness and housing law, policy, procedures and practice
3. Support skills (e.g. challenging behaviour, conflict management, motivational interviewing, professional boundaries) including shadowing other workers	3. Mental health and substance use
4. Health and safety (inc. lone working)	4. Support skills
5. Support planning, processes and systems	5. Welfare, finance, debt policy and practice
6. ACEs, PIE, trauma	6. Health and safety (inc. lone working)
7. Safeguarding	7. Support planning, processes and systems

16.5. The survey then asked '*What could be added or improved to induction training?*', and the most common answers were:

- A more formalised training plan
- Neurodiversity
- Learning disability
- Housing legislation and policy
- Psychological coping mechanisms for support staff
- Complex needs
- Welfare system
- Shadowing other workers

Ongoing training

16.6. The survey also asked respondents about the ongoing training that was provided by the organisation, with the most common answers listed below:

- Health and Safety (including lone working)
- Neurodiversity, mental health, substance use
- ACEs, PIE, TIC, restorative approaches
- Practical support skills
- Welfare, finance, debt policy and practice
- Support processes and systems (support planning, risk assessments, outcomes)
- Equality and diversity
- Safeguarding
- Housing law, policy and practice
- Abuse, violence, exploitation
- Data protection

16.7. Respondents were then asked 'What is the most useful or important ongoing training that frontline homelessness and housing support workers in your organisation receive?' The following table shows the answers grouped into themes, ranked in order of the most common topics mentioned by each respondent group. There was a lot of commonality between the answers given by frontline workers and managers / commissioners.

Frontline workers	Managers
1. Mental health and substance use	1. ACEs, PIE, trauma
2. Homelessness law, policy and practice	2. Mental health and substance use
3. ACEs, PIE, trauma	3. Homelessness law, policy and practice
4. Support skills (inc. complex needs, challenging conversations, managing conflict, professional boundaries)	4. Support skills
5. Safeguarding	5. Welfare system
6. Health and safety (inc. lone working)	6. Safeguarding
7. Welfare system	
8. Abuse, violence and exploitation	

16.8. When respondents were asked what could be added or improved to ongoing training, the following themes arose:

- Neurodiversity
- Learning disability

- Stress and impact on staff
- Complex needs
- Working with local authorities
- Multi agency working
- Housing legislation including eligibility
- Welfare system

16.9. These topics are very similar to those suggested in answer to the corresponding question about induction training. The main differences are the addition of 'working with local authorities' and 'multi-agency working', which suggests that frontline workers would benefit from training on these topics once they have settled into their roles and have started to build relationships with other agencies.

17. Developing a qualification for frontline homelessness workers

17.1. One of the key considerations for this workstream was the development of a qualification for homelessness and housing support workers in Wales.

17.2. This was driven by a number of factors:

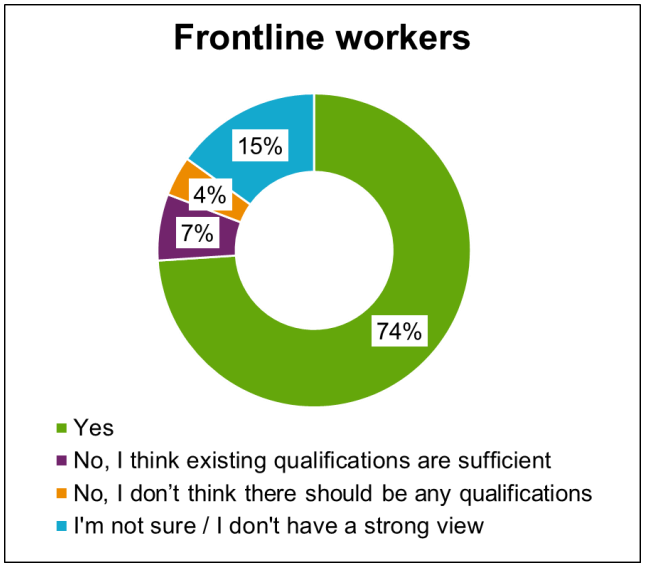
- Frontline workers and organisations are keen to support continuous professional development, and feel that a qualification would be invaluable to support the workforce to deliver excellent services.
- The complexity of needs, levels of risk, and the need to fill gaps left by overstretched public services, means that frontline homelessness and housing support staff are dealing with very complex and challenging circumstances every day.
- Currently, staff who want to gain a qualification are forced to embark on courses that do not fully meet their needs. Some undertake a general housing qualification, while other undertake a health and social care qualification. While both provide useful learning, feedback suggests that neither fully meet the needs of homelessness and housing support workers.
- The homelessness and housing support workforce often feel that they do not receive the recognition and respect they deserve from professionals working in other services, due to them not holding a professional qualification. They are often regarded as 'just a support worker' and this means that they can feel undervalued and their views are not taken seriously.

17.3. We were keen to understand the appetite for a specific qualification for homelessness and housing support workers, and included questions about this in our survey of frontline workers, and our survey of managers and commissioners.

Support for the development of a qualification

17.4. The surveys found that 74% of frontline workers thought a qualification should be developed, while 60% of managers and commissioners agreed. Only 11% of frontline workers, and just 7% of managers and commissioners disagreed with the development of a qualification.

"It [a homelessness and housing support qualification] would be great, especially in relation to the reward and recognition debate."





Reasons for opposing a qualification

17.5. We asked why people disagreed with the development of a specific qualification, in order to understand why there might be opposition and whether there were key barriers we needed to consider if a qualification was developed. The following points were made by respondents:

- There was a strong sense from several people that on-the-job experience was equally or more valuable than a formal qualification, along with people having the right values.
- Some people felt that the training provided during induction and continuous professional development opportunities were sufficient.
- Some people expressed fears that a qualification could be a barrier to recruitment, as some people may not be willing, confident or able to undertake a formal qualification
- Some people felt that their existing qualifications (e.g. health and social care qualifications) were sufficient

17.6. These comments all provide a valuable insight into people's views on existing training, the value of a new qualification, and fears about how a qualification could exclude or discourage people from working in the sector. While none of these comments provide a compelling argument that a qualification should not be developed, they certainly emphasise the importance of a qualification being optional, rather than mandatory, as well as signalling support for a more vocational route, emphasising the importance of on-the-job experience rather than a qualification rooted in academia.

Ensuring a qualification is accessible and inclusive

17.7. As demonstrated by the paragraphs above, the need for any new qualification to be accessible and inclusive was a key theme in our considerations. We asked the survey respondents for their views on how this could be done, and the following points were made:

- It should be optional, not mandatory
- It should be fully funded by the Welsh Government or through local authority commissioning (i.e. included in the contract value)
- Learners need to have the (paid) time to undertake the qualification
- The qualification should be flexible so that people can learn at their own pace
- The qualification should be a combination of theory and practice, with both online and work-based elements, with learning materials available in different formats. It could include peer learning, reflection, visits to other projects.

- Academic ability should not be a barrier to entry (i.e. existing qualifications as entry requirements) or participation in the qualification (e.g. assessment process).

17.8. We also asked frontline workers, managers and commissioners for their views on what should be included in a qualification for homelessness and housing support workers. The following table outlines the most common answers:

Frontline workers	Managers
1. Homelessness law, policy and practice	1. Practical support skills
2. Welfare system, finance and debt	2. Homelessness law, policy and practice
3. Practical support skills	3. ACEs, PIE, Trauma
4. ACEs, PIE, Trauma	4. Welfare system
5. Mental health and substance use	5. Mental health and substance use
6. Safeguarding	
7. Abuse, violence and exploitation	

Case study: CIH Level 3 Certificate in Providing Homelessness Services

17.9. During our work to consider the development of a qualification for homelessness and housing support workers, we looked into the Level 3 Certificate in Providing Homelessness Services, which has recently been developed and delivered in England. This is delivered by Homeless Link, the national membership charity for homelessness organisations in England, and accredited by CIH.

17.10. This course aims to equip participants with practical skills to support individuals who are experiencing or at risk of homelessness, with a focus on understanding their needs and building on their strengths and personal goals. Through a trauma-informed and strengths-based approach, the course units aim to deepen people's knowledge and enhance their ability to provide effective support.

17.11. The qualification covers key aspects of homelessness through four compulsory units:

- Homelessness services and prevention
- Role of the practitioner for independent living
- Engaging people with lived experience of homelessness
- Professional practice skills for housing

17.12. The qualification takes approximately 20 weeks, with learners expected to dedicate around 8 hours of study per week, which can include work-based investigations, independent study, engaging with online materials, additional reading and research, and completing assignments.

17.13. The qualification has entry requirements, which means that learners need to:

- Be working in a paid or voluntary capacity within the housing or homelessness sector

AND

- have completed a Level 2 qualification (equivalent to GCSE) or higher.

17.14. More information about the qualification can be found here and the course specification can be found here.

17.15. During this work, we welcomed Kate Alaway, Head of National Workforce Development at Homeless Link, to speak to the Workforce Task and Finish Group about the qualification. The meeting was extremely helpful, providing valuable insight into the background and learning from the development of the qualification in England.

17.16. The rationale for developing the qualification was very similar to the discussions we are having in Wales:

- Homelessness and housing support staff were not being recognised for their skills and expertise by colleagues working in other sectors
- Organisations were struggling to retain staff, due to burnout, the impact of the pandemic, and an increase in complexity of support needs
- The sector was keen to help to develop staff confidence and skills, and ensure that people using services were getting the best quality support

17.17. Homeless Link led on developing the course content and providing tutors to deliver the course, but worked with Ofqual, CHI (as the awarding body), CHI Housing Academy (who would undertake the assessment).

17.18. Part of the rationale for having entry requirements of a Level 2 qualification or higher, was to ensure that learners could cope with the academic requirements of the course. There are four written assignments that are required as part of the course.

17.19. The cost of the course is £1,065, however, the training is currently being part funded by St Martin-in-the-Fields Charity so they are able to offer a 50% reduction in the course fees to make it more accessible to homelessness organisations.

17.20. Key success factors include:

- Buy in from the learner and their manager
- The learner understanding that it is not just a training course – they need to write assignments and apply the learning to their practice
- The manager needs to allow study time during the working week

17.21. Homeless Link have had the course evaluated at the point of completion and 6 months after, to see whether the learning has been embedded in learners' practice.

17.22. Key outcomes at the point of completion are:

- 84% reported increased confidence
- 74% felt that their knowledge and ability to support people had increased
- 85% felt that accreditation was really important

17.23. Key outcomes 6 months after completion include:

- 100% reported increased confidence
- 74% had benefited from career development (internally or elsewhere)
- 67% felt a sense of recognition from their peers
- 87% felt it had strengthened their practice / they had embedded learning within their practice

17.24. When members of the Workforce Task and Finish Group asked about whether some learners had struggled, the following issues were highlighted as risk factors:

- The learner or their manager had not fully considered the time commitment required
- Leaners struggled with the academic requirements, such as writing the assignments
- Learners being put forward for the qualification without having much enthusiasm for it themselves.
- Work becoming too busy
- Personal circumstances have changed

17.25. The Workforce Task and Finish Group felt that there was some useful learning from the development of the qualification, but some of the risk factors resonated with the feedback from our surveys and workshops that any qualification developed for the workforce in Wales

should be flexible enough to be undertaken alongside work, and should not be too academic focused, in order to avoid excluding or discouraging people from participating.

18. Values, attributes, knowledge and understanding

18.1. Following on from our survey about training and qualifications, we considered how the knowledge, skills and competencies of frontline homelessness and housing support workers could be captured, and how this could inform and align with training requirements for the sector.

18.2. We had received strong feedback from the sector about the importance of values and interpersonal skills, alongside more formal knowledge and training, and were keen to reflect this.

18.3. The Workforce Task and Finish Group had looked at existing frameworks, such as the Social Care Pay and Progression Framework, which had been developed as part of the Welsh Government's commitment to fair work and pay for the social care sector. The framework was published for consultation in 2023, and included sections on values, attributes, skills, knowledge and understanding. We also looked at the National Homelessness Skills Framework, developed by Homeless Link in England.

18.4. As part of this work, we ran a workshop at Cymorth Cymru's annual conference in January 2025, which asked participants to contribute their views on the values, attributes, knowledge and understanding required for different levels of role. The following feedback has been collated into tables that are inspired by the social care pay and progression framework.

Support worker

Values and attributes	Knowledge and understanding	Required training
• Empathy and compassion • Strong interpersonal skills • Listening and communication skills • Ability to remain resilient • Advocacy and negotiation • Ability to build partnerships, work collaboratively and as part of a team • Ability to understand and maintain professional boundaries	• Understanding of relevant homelessness and housing legislation • Understanding of Adverse Childhood Experiences, psychologically informed environments and the ability to deliver trauma informed approaches. • Understanding of the welfare system and ability to help someone access their entitlements • Understanding of procedures regarding case recording, reporting and monitoring • Ability to undertake assessments of need,	• Housing legislation • Homelessness prevention • Welfare / benefits system • Psychologically informed environments • Adverse Childhood Experiences • Vicarious trauma • Mental health and suicide prevention • Substance use • Co-occurring MH and SU • Neurodiversity • VAWDASV • Equality and diversity, including anti-racism • Providing inclusive and accessible support • County lines and exploitation • Working with complexity

• Ability to remain calm and respond effectively to a crisis • Inclusive and supportive of equality and diversity • Able to show initiative, be solution focused and think creatively • Commitment to being person-centred	develop support plans and deliver person centred support • Understanding of risk and how to appropriately manage risk • Understanding of how to provide inclusive and accessible support to people from a variety of backgrounds, including people with protected characteristics	• Whole person approach • Case reporting and monitoring • Safeguarding (level 2) • Professional boundaries • Risk management • Incident reporting • Conflict management / de-escalation • Health and safety • Lone working • GDPR

18.5. Participants were supportive of the development of Level 2 and Level 3 qualifications for homelessness and housing support workers, but emphasised that this should not be mandatory and should not be required as part of the recruitment process. Some people also suggested that apprenticeships should also be considered.

Senior or specialist support worker

18.6. There was a consensus that a senior or specialist support worker would require the same values, attributes, knowledge, understanding and training as a support worker, but the following were viewed as additional requirements for this level:

Values and attributes	Knowledge and understanding	Required training
• Prior experience of support work • Ability to build strong networks externally • Reliable and flexible • Approachable and relatable • Motivating • Reflective • Coaching skills	• Understanding of how to lead a team, and how to support and develop team members • Understanding of the value of working in a reflective way, and an ability to develop a reflective culture, and deliver reflective practice • Understanding of line management duties and practices • Detailed knowledge and understanding of the relevant area of specialism (for specialist support workers)	• Line management and supervision • Sickness and absence management • Leadership • Coaching • Reflective practice • Training in relevant area of specialism – please note, this may relate to other training frameworks (e.g. VAWDASV training framework)

18.7. In addition, participants felt that senior or specialist workers should be able to embark on a Level 3 qualification.

Team leader / project co-ordinator

18.8. The following were viewed as additional requirements for team leaders or project co-ordinators, on top of those in the tables above.

Values and attributes	Knowledge and understanding	Required training
• Prior experience of being a support worker • Compassionate leadership • Ability to build partnerships	• Knowledge of sector best practice and innovation • Understanding of commissioning and procurement processes • Ability and understanding of how to provide good quality supervision	• Leadership and management • Budgeting • Bid writing / tendering • Project management • Safeguarding Level 3

18.9. In addition, participants felt that team leaders / project coordinators should have a Level 3 or Level 4 qualification.

19. Recommendations

Skills and training framework for homelessness and housing support workers

19.1. A standardised skills and training framework for homelessness and housing support workers should be developed, consulted on, and published. This should in the first instance be informed by the findings of this report, including the survey of frontline workers and managers / commissioners, and the workshop held at the Cymorth Cymru annual conference. Learning should also be taken from the social care pay and progression framework and the Homeless Link National Homelessness Skills Framework. Consideration should be given to the range of homelessness and housing support roles that should included in this framework, as well recognising where some specialist roles already have their own skills and qualification frameworks.

19.2. The Welsh Government should ensure that relevant policy and guidance (e.g. the Housing Support Grant practice guidance) and grant terms and conditions, require homelessness and housing support service contracts to include the appropriate level of funding and staff time to enable staff to undertake appropriate training.

19.3. The Welsh Government should work with other relevant parts of government to ensure that this aligns with, and complements, existing training frameworks and requirements for housing support roles that overlap with other policy areas, such as VAWDASV, youth work and social care.

Qualification for homelessness and housing support workers

19.4. Specific qualifications for homelessness and housing support workers in Wales should be developed. This could include qualifications at level 2, 3 and 4, with the development of a level 2 qualification being prioritised initially.

19.5. The qualification should be inclusive of a wide range of people and its structure and content should therefore incorporate the feedback gathered from the sector, including:

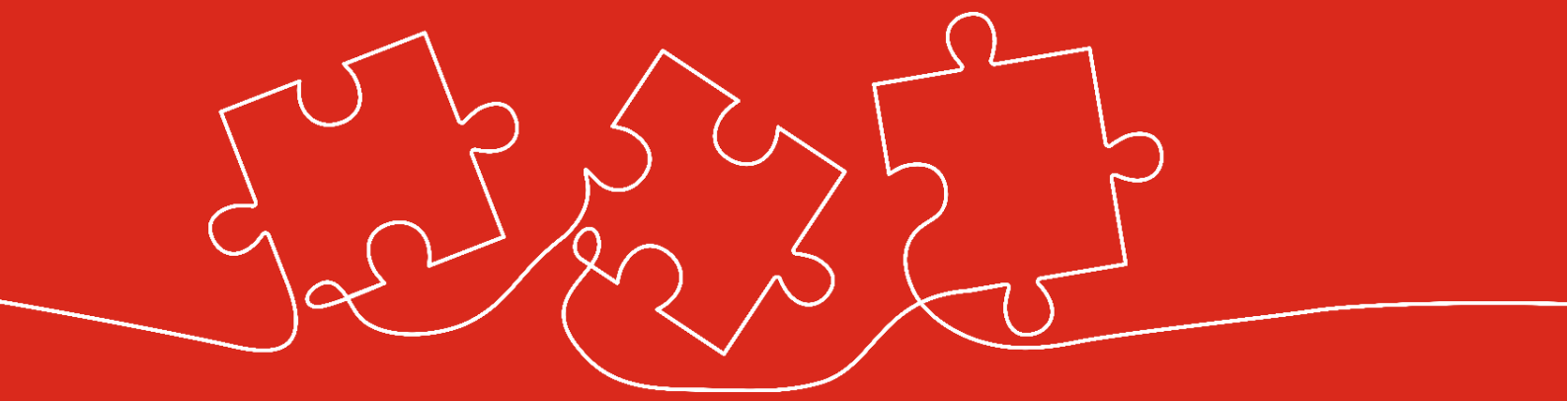
- The qualification should be optional, not mandatory
- Academic ability or experience should not be a barrier to entry (i.e. existing qualifications should not be required for entry)
- The qualification should be more vocational than academic, avoiding the need for learners to submit lengthy essays or academic papers.
- Learners need to have the (paid) time to undertake the qualification
- The qualification should be flexible so that people can learn at their own pace

- It should be fully funded by the Welsh Government or through local authority commissioning (i.e. included in the contract value)

19.6. The Welsh Government should consider a pilot programme to test and evaluate the qualification with a cohort of learners, which is fully funded.

19.7. Once the qualification has been developed and piloted, the Welsh Government should ensure that relevant policy and guidance (e.g. the Housing Support Grant practice guidance) and grant terms and conditions, require homelessness and housing support service contracts to include the appropriate level of funding and staff time to enable relevant staff to undertake the qualification.

Commissioning to create a resilient and valued workforce



20. Introduction

20.1. The homelessness and housing support workforce do incredibly complex work in extremely challenging circumstances, supporting people with experience of trauma, domestic abuse, exploitation, mental health and substance use problems, helping them to navigate complex housing and welfare systems and legislation, and often being the one person that they can rely on. However, too often, these workers do not receive the recognition, respect and reward they deserve.

20.2. Evidence collected over the last few years has shown that low pay has led to frontline homelessness and housing support workers being pushed closer to poverty, with many struggling to pay their rent and bills, and some being at risk of homelessness themselves.

20.3. As well as the impact on individual members of staff, low pay has also led to high levels of staff turnover, with people being able to find higher paid, and often less stressful, work in other sectors. This has a significant impact on organisations that have invested in the recruitment and training of staff. It also has a negative impact on people using services, who often find it difficult to build trust and can find staff turnover unsettling and distressing.

20.4. It is important to point out that support providers would like to pay support workers a much higher wage, but funding constraints and commissioning processes have made this very difficult.

21. Commissioning sub-group

21.1. The Commissioning sub-group was purposefully established after the other sub-groups had embarked on their work, as it was recognised that many of the recommendations on pay, support for staff, and training would require changes to how services are commissioned and funded.

21.2. The commissioning sub-group was chaired by Chele Howard, Head of Housing and Communities at Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council, and there were representatives from three other local authorities, a third sector support provider and Cymorth Cymru.

Terms of reference

21.3. The terms of reference for the group stated that the purpose of the Commissioning Sub-Group is to provide recommendations to the Workforce Task and Finish Group to inform on best practice commissioning guidance for housing support and homelessness services commissioned through the Housing Support Grant budget (HSG). This guidance aims to ensure that HSG service providers can attract, retain and support a skilled and talented workforce focussed on delivering good outcomes for those who are experiencing or at risk of homelessness.

21.4. The recommendations should focus on:

- Good practice cost and quality thresholds for tender evaluation or contract commissioning.
- Identifying what aspects will form part of any good practice evaluation process on workforce and staffing after fixed assumptions / pre-requisites have been removed from the evaluation. These are:
- Providers are expected to follow commissioning guidance on pay. The guidance should refer to the independent work on sector pay through the workstream on pay highlighted in paragraph 1.5 and associated recommendations the task and finish group will make to the EHNAB.

- Providers are expected to allow time (and cost) within contracts for staff training/qualifications. This will need to refer to recommendations made by the Skills and Qualifications sub-group (highlighted in paragraph 1.5) and final report to EHNAB on skills and qualifications.
- Providers are expected to allow for time and cost for reflective practice and support services to be provided for staff whenever they are needed. This will need to refer to the recommendations made by the Support for Staff sub-group in paragraph 1.5 and final report to EHNAB on Support Services for staff.
- Providing commissioning guidance on pressure, risk and complexity so that commissioners know that the appropriate level and type of service has been specified by tenderers which meets specialist and complex needs and safeguards staff and other people using the service.
- Commissioners having realistic expectations about the scope and scale of what can be delivered within the resources available.
- Commissioners taking a considered view of length of contracts/re-commissioning / decommissioning / reconfiguring of services to support the aims to attract and retain a talented workforce.

Commissioning group workshops

21.5. The commissioning sub-group approached the development of its recommendations by holding a series of workshops, some involving sub-group members only, and another involving a wider audience of support providers and commissioners.

21.6. The 'internal' workshops included discussions on:

- recommendations to the Welsh Government to support the development of a resilient and valued workforce
- recommendations for changes to the Welsh Government's Housing Support Grant guidance.

21.7. Following these workshops, a number of recommendations were agreed by members of the sub-group

21.8. The 'external' workshop utilised a meeting of Cymorth Cymru's Psychologically Informed Environments Network, which was held on 30th April 2024 and was attended by 47 people, including third sector support providers, housing associations and local authority staff (both service providers and commissioners). The meeting utilised breakout rooms to ensure that everyone could contribute, and focused on two key questions:

- How can we make the Housing Support Grant commissioning process more psychologically-informed?
- How can we ensure that the commissioning process helps to deliver psychologically-informed / trauma-informed services?

21.9. Notes were taken from each breakout room and a report was produced, which summarised the discussions and made a series of recommendations. This was discussed in detail at the commissioning sub-group and members supported all of the recommendations, with a few minor amendments.

Importance of a resilient and valued workforce to commissioners

21.10. During these discussions there was a strong sense from both providers and commissioners that a resilient and valued workforce was critical to achieving the wider ambitions of making homelessness rare, brief and non-repeated. Support providers were acutely aware of the

impact on service delivery when they are unable to recruit and retain staff, not least on the consistency and continuity they are able to provide for people using services, which is so critical for people who have experienced trauma and previous system failures.

21.11. Local authority commissioners were equally emphatic about the importance of having a valued and resilient workforce. They feel a huge responsibility to ensure that they commission the best quality support services, which meet the needs of vulnerable people within their communities. They know that services being able to recruit skilled and experienced staff is central to this aim, and share the frustrations that frontline workers in this sector have not received the recognition and reward they deserve. They voiced similar concerns about staff turnover having a particularly negative impact on people who have experienced trauma and take time to build trusting relationships.

21.12. As well as ensuring the best possible outcomes for people using services, commissioners were also concerned about the wider risk of service failure, should a service be unable to recruit and retain enough staff with the necessary experience and skills. The reliance on agency staff was also a concern for both providers and commissioners, particularly when resources are scarce. There was a strong view that paying permanent staff higher wages, and ensuring they felt supported and valued, would lead to better retention and therefore reduce reliance on costly agency staff. The uncertainty and instability from annual funding settlements, often announced close to the year end, as well as staff worries during re-commissioning processes, can also lead to recruitment and retention issues.

21.13. While there were some differences in views within the commissioning sub-group, and during the workshops with a broader group of support providers and commissioners, there was a lot of consensus about what needs to change. There was also a recognition that commissioning was central to delivering this change, and many of the recommendations that have emerged from the other sub-groups on pay, support systems for staff, and training and qualifications. It is also important to note that many commissioners would like to do things differently, and want to embrace a more psychologically informed approach, but the level of funding they receive through the Housing Support Grant, in conjunction with barriers resulting from local or national procurement rules, often prevented them from doing so.

21.14. This report makes a series of recommendations for both the Welsh Government and commissioners. The Welsh Government will need to consider how it can enable commissioners to make the changes outlined below, through the budget setting process and the development of policy and guidance. There are also questions for local authority procurement teams, regarding the inflexibility of procurement rules, and how they can support their homelessness and housing support commissioners to get the most out of the services they commission. As one commissioner said:

"When you're buying pens and pencils all the same size, I get it. You can say this is value for money. But our services and people's needs don't fit in the same boxes, they don't come in the same colour."

22. Recommendations

22.1. There was significant overlap between all three discussions and the recommendations that resulted from them. As a result, we have structured this report thematically, with recommendations from each of the discussions collated and combined within the appropriate section.

22.2. The recommendations are predominantly aimed at the Welsh Government and commissioners of homelessness and housing support services.

A. Sustainable funding for workforce stability and security

Sustainable funding is key to enabling commissioners and providers to create the conditions for a resilient and valued workforce. Ring-fenced, multi-year settlements announced as early as possible within a financial year would enable commissioners to provide assurance and longer-term contracts to support providers, who would subsequently be able to offer job security to workers, helping to recruit and retain high quality, experienced staff to deliver the best possible outcomes for people using services.

A1: The **Welsh Government** should provide multi-year indicative settlements for the Housing Support Grant and Homelessness Prevention Grant, at a level that reflect inflationary increases and increases in demand and complexity.

A2: The **Welsh Government** should retain the Housing Support Grant as a separate, ring-fenced grant and not incorporate it into the Revenue Support Grant

A3: The **Welsh Government** should announce its final budget earlier in the financial year, to enable commissioners and providers to plan for the next year

A4: The **Welsh Government**, in partnership with commissioners and providers, should review the appropriateness of the conventional 80/10/10 split of costs across a contract, and what is included within this, to ensure full cost recovery within commissioned services. This should take into account inflationary increases to elements of service provision and changes to expectations regarding the provision of reflective practice, support and training, since the 80/10/10 split was adopted.

A5: **Welsh Government** to review and refine guidance around the interface between statutory social care and homelessness duties, to ensure that the available funding meets its intended objectives, and that staff are suitably trained and resourced to deal with the cohorts of people that they are expected to work with.

A6: **Commissioners** should award longer term contracts, with appropriate inflationary increases or break clauses built into the contract.

A7: **Commissioners** should be fully transparent about how the cost of the contract was calculated and open to working with providers to understand cost barriers to delivering safe, high quality services within that funding envelope. The **Welsh Government** should consider guidance that requires this.

A8: **Commissioners** should have greater consideration of the impact of geography on the amount of support that can practically be delivered in rural areas.

B. Building fair pay into contracts

Fair pay is critical to recruiting and retaining a resilient and valued workforce. In order to implement the recommendations of the pay sub-group, the Welsh Government and commissioners need to ensure that enough funding is available to homelessness and housing support services.

B1. The **Welsh Government** should provide funding commitment to the Housing Support Grant and Homelessness Prevention Grant to enable an increase in frontline staff wages in line with Workforce Task and Finish Group pay recommendations, reinforcing this through guidance and grant terms and conditions where appropriate, to ensure commissioners fully fund fair pay in the sector.

B2. **Commissioners** should ensure that support providers receive enough funding to implement that recommendations from the pay sub-group.

B3: The **Welsh Government** should create a workforce section in the Housing Support Grant guidance with some clear bullet points, good practice hints, and tips for commissioners, including, for example, the application of Fair Work principles.

B4. The **Welsh Government** and **commissioners** to work to end the pay disparity between in-house local authority services and commissioned third sector services.

C. Building training and support systems into contracts

The implementation of the recommendations from the training and support systems for staff sub-groups will be reliant on the Welsh Government and commissioners ensuring that enough funding is made available to homelessness and housing support services.

C1. The **Welsh Government** to require appropriate training for staff to be built into contracts, in line with the recommendations from the training and qualifications workstream of the Workforce Task and Finish Group.

C2. **Commissioners** should include the costs (both the staff time and costs of providing training) in the contract value when commissioning services

C3. The **Welsh Government** to require reflective practice and appropriate support for staff to be built into contracts, in line with the recommendations from the support systems for staff workstream of the Workforce Task and Finish Group.

C4. **Commissioners** should include the costs (both the staff time and the costs of providing reflective practice, clinical supervision, support) in the contract value when commissioning services.

D. Co-production and partnership during commissioning and contract management

Co-production and partnership are seen as critical to a positive procurement and commissioning process, which in turn can provide assurance to the workforce during a time of uncertainty. If approached well, this assurance could improve retention, providing workforce stability that can continue to meet the needs of people using services.

D1. The **Welsh Government** should use the Housing Support Grant guidance to highlight the importance of co-production between commissioners and providers in the development of service models and service delivery. This should include good practice such as:

- Commissioners and providers investing time in developing good quality relationships, within the parameters of procurement legislation.
- Commissioners spending more time with services to broaden their understanding operational realities, challenges and opportunities – and for providers to better understand the perspectives of commissioners and the rules that affect the procurement process, such as legislation, standing orders and internal procurement rules.
- Commissioners building in meaningful opportunities to co-produce specifications and shape service design with providers and people using services, before the formal tendering process begins.
- Good practice regarding the development of trusting relationships between partners to enable the development of effective partnerships / consortium working during the commissioning process (with particular consideration to how this can work across larger/smaller and generic/specialist providers).
- Commissioners and providers exploring opportunities for shared training to enable sharing of perspectives, learning and development.

D2. **Commissioners** should embed this good practice in their work with providers.

E. Managing transitions and workforce instability during commissioning

The period leading up to, and during, the commissioning process can be very destabilising for the workforce, with fears about job security having a negative impact on their wellbeing and providing challenges to the recruitment and retention of staff. This subsequently has an impact on people using services, who may face further disruption if a contract changes hands, with consistency and continuity being critical to building positive, trusting relationships with support workers.

E1: The **Welsh Government** should provide guidance and consider implementing policies to improve the commissioning process and effectively manage the transition process when contracts change hands. This should include:

- Commissioners being clear about commissioning timescales well in advance, and not changing them – or when they do, communicating this quickly and effectively.
- Commissioners providing commissioning timescales of an appropriate length to enable organisations, particular smaller and more specialist organisations with limited core capacity, to develop high quality, properly costed bids. Timescales should also take into account the time required to facilitate the transition between providers, including appropriate transition for people using services, transfer of data and issues such as TUPE.
- Commitment to good partnership working between commissioners and providers to ensure continuity and consistency for clients.
- Good practice guidance for managing transitions between providers to ensure continuity and consistency for clients.
- Consideration of how to communicate and support the frontline workforce during a transition to a new provider, including how to manage the TUPE process.
- policies to ensure outgoing providers provide accurate and timely TUPE (Transfer of Undertakings Protection of Employment) information.

E2. **Commissioners** should embed this good practice in their work with providers.

F. Support for better procurement

Procurement is a highly complex area, which homelessness and housing support commissioners do not have complete control over. They have to work within the legislative framework and within the rules and standing orders of their respective local authorities. Real or perceived procurement rules are often cited by providers and commissioners as barriers to taking a more flexible and psychologically informed approach to commissioning homelessness services.

F1: The **Welsh Government and commissioners** should consider whether changes need to be made to procurement rules to enable commissioning processes to be more psychologically informed.

F2: The **Welsh Government** should either develop standalone guidance or amend the Housing Support Grant guidance to include:

- A link to Cyd (Home - CYD Procurement), the new procurement centre of excellence that's being supported by Welsh Government.
- a paragraph on the Healthcare Procurement Act, in Annex E to have due regard to this and highlight some of the services where it may apply (e.g. mental health).
- how to best ensure that procurement is flexible in the commissioning of HSG services.
- Guidance that better describes, encourages and facilitates a more psychologically informed approach to commissioning and service delivery, including how to remove barriers to this.
- review and consider impacts of delegated procurement policies on the ability for 3rd sector and smaller organisations to submit tenders.

- Commissioners to ensure that they properly take into account workforce impacts of their procurement exercises, for example ensuring bidders have enough time to get accurate information, that there's accurate TUPE information and are able to accurately submit a proposal that ensures good quality workforce.
- Further guidance and support for HSG commissioners to navigate conversations with procurement colleagues.

F3: **Local authority commissioners** should be mindful of implications of procurement processes and should be encouraged to only undertake procurement exercises where there is an identified benefit, and the existing section in the guidance strengthened referencing the negative impact that such process can have on frontline staff and service users.

F4: **Local authorities** should consider how their internal procurement policies and standing orders enable the commissioning of trauma-informed, person-centred services to enable a sustainable and resilient workforce.

F5: **Local authority commissioners** should consider how their polices enable smaller third sector providers to fully participate on an equal footing during commissioning processes.

G. Trusting and empowering the workforce

The homelessness and housing support workforce is extremely skilled, knowledgeable and experienced at providing high quality, person-centred support to people facing multiple and complex challenges. However, too often, they do not receive the recognition and respect they deserve. Trust, empowerment, and recognition are critical to creating a valued workforce, and this can be supported through improvements in guidance and the commissioning and management of contracts.

G1: The **Welsh Government** should allow more flexibility for Commissioners to provide more creative solutions to meet identified needs that are aligned to the Housing Support Grant outcomes framework.

G2: The **Welsh Government** should review how local authorities interpret and implement the Housing Support Grant guidance with a specific focus on how flexible local authorities are in regard to the legacy of ‘allowable activities’, which were part of previous grant guidance. Guidance should be amended, if necessary, to promote flexibility, person centred, and psychologically informed approaches to what activities are allowed within a contract.

G3: **Commissioners** should adopt an approach that offers more flexibility and places trust in services and workers to determine the best approach to supporting people, such as

- Greater flexibility and a more person-centred approach to caseloads and intensity of support.
- Removal of arbitrary time limits for support services, with length of support being appropriate to the type of service commissioned and the needs of the person using the service.
- Greater trust in support providers to take decisions on these issues.
- Less prescription on number of hours staff spend on particular activities.
- Greater flexibility from commissioners to enable innovation, creativity and psychologically informed approaches.

H. Data collection

While data collection is important for accountability and to understand the reach and impact of services, there are instances where excessive data collection places an additional administrative burden on workers, who would like to prioritise the provision of support to their clients. When the

workforce cannot understand the need for some data collection, particularly where it is not required in other local authority areas, this can increase frustration and affect job satisfaction, which could risk retention of good quality staff.

H1: The **Welsh Government** should provide an advice note or guidance to enable more consistency and avoid unnecessary data collection.

H2: **Local authority commissioners** should take a more consistent approach to collecting data from projects to ensure projects are not asked for unnecessary information that places an avoidable administrative burden on services. Special consideration should be given to data collection for particular groups, for whom data sharing may pose a risk, such as survivors of abuse and violence.

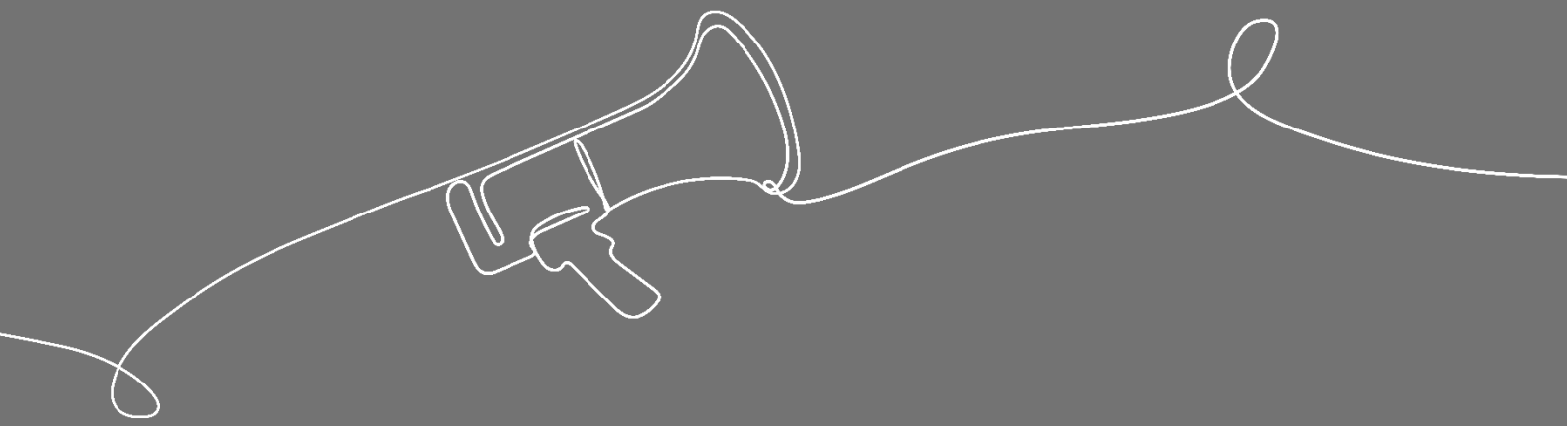
23. Additional recommendations

23.1. The following recommendations also emerged from the workshops, but do not directly relate to the commissioning of homelessness and housing support services. We propose to include these in the wider Workforce Task and Finish Group report.

- Link chapters to reinforce messaging e.g. referring to Chapter 2, which already includes psychologically informed services. [to be incorporated with the PIE recommendations].
- Welsh Government to undertake a review of the impact of changes to statutory organisations' responsibilities on the housing and homelessness workforce.
- Recommendation 5: Other statutory organisations to review their responsibilities and impact on the HSG and on the housing and homelessness workforce (e.g. Mental Health, Probation, and Police responding to people within HSG projects who need additional intervention beyond the responsibility of HSG workers).
- Welsh Government to continue to support ACE Hub Wales to encourage and support psychologically informed or trauma informed approaches across all public service areas.

Appendix 1:

Developing a resilient and valued workforce: Views from the Frontline Network Wales



Developing a resilient and valued workforce: Views from the Frontline Network Wales

January 2022

1. Introduction

Cymorth Cymru has written this paper to assist the Workforce Task and Finish Group (WT&FG), which has been established by the Housing Support National Advisory Board to advise the Welsh Government on how to deliver the workforce-related recommendations from the Homelessness Action Group reports.

We have long advocated for frontline homelessness and housing support workers to have opportunities to share their experiences and ideas, and actively contribute towards the development of policy. Members of the WT&FG shared this view and agreed that Cymorth Cymru should utilise the Frontline Network Wales to engage with frontline workers and gather their opinions on workforce issues.

The Frontline Network Wales is delivered by Cymorth Cymru in partnership with the Frontline Network, which works across the UK to support workers from the public, statutory and voluntary sectors working on the frontline with those experiencing homelessness. Established in late 2020, the Frontline Network Wales holds regular regional meetings for frontline staff to share their experiences of working in the sector, and discuss suggestions and ideas for developing policy.

One of the many strengths of the network is that it enables us to gather the experiences and ideas of frontline staff across Wales, helping to give a clear view of the sector across the different regions. CEOs and leaders of services have numerous opportunities to shape policy and have their voices heard, but as this task and finish group has acknowledged, it is critical for this piece of work that the voices of frontline workers are included from the start.

Right now, we have a unique opportunity make significant and lasting improvements to the sector, guided by the recommendations of the Action Plan for Ending Homelessness, and backed by the recent Welsh Government draft budget announcements to achieve the Programme for Government commitment to transform homeless services in Wales. It is crucial that we listen to the views of frontline workers in the sector, and utilise their experience and insight.

2. Who were the people we spoke to and what were their backgrounds?

We spoke to 45 frontline homelessness and housing support workers across 6 regional online meetings. We asked the attendees a series of questions about their current roles and experiences, as well as exploring what attracted them to the sector and what keeps them here.

2.1 Current roles

Frontline workers taking part in the network discussion across Wales include a range of job roles:

- Advice Worker
- Bond Scheme Officer
- Business Consultant
- Case Worker
- Community Link Worker
- Crisis Response Worker
- Emergency Accommodation Officer
- Employer and Partnership Manager
- Employment Engagement Manager
- Family Intervention Worker
- Family Support Assistant
- Family Support Officer
- Finance & Housing Benefit Admin
- Floating Support Worker
- Head of Resettlement
- Helpline & Refuge Senior Practitioner
- Homeless Prevention Support Officer
- Housing & Prevention Services Manager
- Housing Advice Officer
- Housing First Co-ordinator
- Housing First Support Worker
- Housing IDVA
- Housing Law Caseworker
- Housing Options - Homeless case officer
- Housing Options Advisor
- Housing Options Officer
- Housing Solutions Manager
- Housing Support Worker
- Lettings Facilitator
- Neighbourhood Officer
- Outreach and Resettlement Officer
- Partnerships Officer
- Project Manager
- Project Worker
- Project Worker, Engagement and Awareness
- Prison Liaison Officer
- Senior Housing Intervention Worker
- Senior Lettings Facilitator
- Senior Support Worker
- Service Coordinator
- SMS Outreach Worker
- Specialist Support Outreach Worker
- Specialist Support Worker
- Substance Misuse Worker
- Support Advocate
- Support Assistant
- Support Worker
- Supported Lodgings Development Worker
- Team Manager Team Around the Tenancy
- Tenancy Floating Support
- Tenancy Support Officer
- Tenancy Sustainability Officer
- Welfare Rights & Money Advice Officer
- Young Person's Housing Support Officer

2.2 People's backgrounds

While many people had worked in homelessness and housing support for several years, or even decades, others had entered the sector more recently and had previously worked in very different roles and industries. This included retail, factory work, administration, the civil service, special needs education, the police and nursing. There was clear evidence that people had gained transferable skills in other jobs, such as teamwork, building trust and developing positive relationships, which were really valuable in support work. Many talked about the job satisfaction they gained from their new role and illustrated the potential for recruiting people with the right values and skills from outside of the sector.

> **"Was a sales manager in retail before - bit of a culture shock [moving to support work] - but I wanted to give something back, retail can be takey, takey."**

> **"Worked in factory, always liked helping people, did some mentoring, gained numerous qualifications. When the factory closed down I worked with a hostel, then street homelessness project, and progressed to tenancy support."**

3. What do you enjoy about your job?

3.1 Making a difference

What united attendees, and in many cases keeps people in what is often a challenging sector, is the desire to help others and make a positive difference to people lives. Helping people find and sustain tenancies, gain access to support for mental health, substance use, and advice with financial planning were repeatedly mentioned as motivating factors. Many recognised the positive impact of early intervention in reducing harm, particularly when working with young people. One person spoke of their lived experience of homelessness, explaining that their motivation for working in homelessness and housing support comes from wanting to give something back to the sector that helped them. Another person who used to work as a debt collector with responsibility for evictions realised they wanted to help people stay in their tenancies, so became a housing options advisor. This is clearly a sector that is attractive to people with empathy and a drive to help others, and these are clearly things to be celebrated.

> **"The reason I stay is because I love it, it's the best job I've ever had, I love to see people able to move on and continue with their lives."**

> **"I love it, helping young people to find independent skills, caring about them, making sure they are moving forward with their lives."**

> **"The ability to help someone set up their own place and feel confident is the reason why I do this job, a sense of achievement and worth, we certainly don't do it for the money."**

> **"I've got lived experience and I want to give something back and share what I have learned."**

3.2 Variety and challenge

A desire to help people is a big part of people's motivation for working in the sector, but not the whole story. Variety was also a very common factor, with many members of the network stating that the wide variety of support they provide makes their work really interesting. The opportunity to learn about a number of different issues, from debt advice to health care is clearly something that attracts many to the profession and keeps them motivated. Many of the staff we spoke to said that no two days were the same and they enjoy the challenge involved in delivering support, often dealing with complexity in pressurised circumstances.

> **"I like the variety of people, variety of challenges, no one day, or hour the same, what keeps me going are the occasional successes we have – and we're always learning."**

> **"This line of work is interesting, challenging, never boring, and it can be rewarding."**

4. What do you dislike about your job

The answers that were given to this question were consistent across all of the regional meetings, it is very clear that wherever someone is based in Wales, the challenges they face in the sector are the same and while this may be disheartening, it does present us with the opportunity to make major improvements to the sector as a whole; by addressing the issues raised here we have the chance to not only improve the working conditions for staff in the sector, but also improve the support people receive.

4.1 Pressure, risk and complexity

Working with people experiencing homelessness, fleeing domestic abuse, or struggling with addiction and mental health needs will always have an emotional impact, however frontline workers have shared experiences of a stark rise in difficult working conditions during the COVID pandemic. Case loads have increased, and the people they are supporting are experiencing loneliness, frustration, boredom and much poorer mental health as a result of COVID restrictions, the lack of permanent accommodation and difficulty accessing other services. Frontline workers are experiencing a rise in levels of abuse from some people using services, who have been made evermore desperate and frustrated by the lack of permanent and even temporary accommodation available.

Many of the frontline workers we have spoken with feel they are close to burn out, after using all their energy and resourcefulness during the height of the pandemic. Although society is starting to open up again, the huge numbers of people in temporary accommodation and requiring support feels overwhelming to many frontline staff, some of whom feel unable to carry on in their roles.

The exploitation of children and adults by organised gangs involved in cuckooing and county lines is also putting support workers in dangerous situations, such as having to visit temporary accommodating targeted by criminal gangs. As a sector we owe a duty of care to these frontline workers, already working in stressful situation, not to let them go unprotected.

Trauma informed, empathic support workers have a lot of experience of working with people in desperate situations, but the combination of the factors mentioned above: pressure of the last two years, lack of resources, means that increasingly people are at crisis point when they present as at risk of homelessness. Support workers are in the unenviable situation of having to tell people in need of support that there is not enough to meet demand, this inevitably leads to worry and adds the emotional strain of an already challenging job, many of the frontline workers who spoke to us said they take these worries home with them, finding it difficult to switch off knowing there are people in desperate need who they are unable to help.

> **"This job is harder and more emotionally draining - keeps you up at night."**

> **"I don't want to be here so long that I don't care but I'm waking up at 3am because I'm worried about the people we are trying to support, it is a tremendous strain."**

> **"I'm having some kind of therapy at the moment, because I'm having panic attacks, my work load is off the scale, I know I have the knowledge and skills to do the job, but not the resources."**

> **"Case load has doubled since Covid, really stressful [...] I do enjoy the job but the stressful side has caused the panic attacks."**

4.2 Lack of resources

The impact of public spending restrictions over the last decade means that services were already stretched before COVID hit the UK. A lack of suitable properties, in particular single person accommodation, were well documented before the added pressures of the pandemic. The enormous effort that went into getting people off the street and into some form of accommodation during the start the crisis showed everyone what was possible. However, as society opens up again, the issues that were present pre-pandemic, lack of suitable permanent accommodation, lack of available temporary accommodation, stretched budgets are still there.

Support workers are faced the impossible task of trying to meet the needs of people without having the resources they need to do their jobs. With approximately 1,000 people a month currently presenting to local authority homelessness departments and a severe lack of suitable properties, staff are having to tell people they cannot find them accommodation.

This situation turns an already challenging situation to a crisis point as burned out staff are forced to consider leaving a job they love for another than pays better and comes with less emotional strain. The dangers for the sector are clear, as we risk losing talented, empathic staff to other sectors, resulting in further strain on homelessness and housing support services.

> **"We're not able to move people on so we're getting a backlog, there are no easy cases – they are incredibly complicated - we don't shut off at the end of the day- but limited as to what we can do when the tools aren't there, single person accommodation is a real issue, the baggage that you go home with at the end of the day is what we really struggle with."**

> **"I need to find temporary accommodation for someone who has been kicked out – our whole day is negative, I've never been this negative- I feel useless, there is nothing I can do to help them- there is no temporary accommodation, no social housing- I don't feel I can cope with this job much longer- and I never thought I would say that- I want to do a bloody good job, but I'm drained, there are not enough resources to help people and we can't help people."**

4.3 Bureaucracy

Frontline homelessness and housing support workers expressed frustration about the burden of bureaucratic processes and having to navigate complex systems on behalf of the people they support. This was exacerbated during the pandemic, as many services moved online and were very difficult to contact and engage with. Many of the frontline workers who spoke to us shared their frustration at the amount of time they needed to spend trying to obtain information from other services, which often resulted in being kept on hold for long periods of time, time they would prefer to spend with people using services. Accessing and navigating the welfare benefits system consistently came up as a drain on their time.

Within the homelessness sector, some of the bureaucracy and reporting requirements were reduced during the pandemic, to enable services to be agile, flexible and meet the challenges posed by COVID. This provides an opportunity to consider whether some of the systems and processes are needed in future, and whether some of these burdens could be permanently lifted to ease the pressure on frontline workers.

4.4 Job uncertainty

The way in which many support services are funded, with annual tendering processes and short-term contracts, results in uncertainty for workers. Not knowing if your job will be funded beyond the end of the year adds to the already pressurised environment, and can force people to choose between doing a job they love, and applying for more secure work that provides financial security for them and their families. This annual funding cycle risks losing talented people to other sectors, and can hinder investment in developing services to meet the needs of people already struggling to access support, a project or a new role often need time to bring about real change.

5. Pay and T&Cs

As above, the feedback from frontline workers regarding pay, and terms and conditions in the sector was consistent across Wales; the pay does not reflect the knowledge needed, or the levels of responsibility expected of these workers.

5.1 Pay

As we see within the social care sector, vital frontline roles in the homelessness and housing support sector are often the lowest paid; as a society we have not yet learned to value these roles enough to make sure that the pay matches their worth. We have a unique opportunity now, as governments around the world reflect on the impact of the global pandemic, to make sure that those frontline workers who have put themselves and their families at risk in order to keep services running to meet the needs of others, are recognised for their expertise, and rightly remunerated. It is a shameful irony that some frontline workers in the sector have described themselves as being pushed towards homelessness by low pay and the uncertainty of short-term contracts.

> **"Underpaid and undervalued, despite dealing with hugely challenging, complex issues."**

> **"Low pay pushes us closer to homelessness."**

> **"It's a systemic problem – it's a female dominated profession, so it is undervalued."**

> **"Our salaries don't go up with inflation but our cost of living does - so council tax bill goes up but my wages don't."**

> **"I'm paid equivalently less now than when I started, cuts have driven down wages."**

> **"We didn't have a pay rise for 10 years – a lot more people hired on higher wages while the frontline workers have stayed on the bottom as if we are not worth more."**

> **"I've done the same job in 2 different local authorities but was paid 2K more in one, and as much as I love the job I've had to jump from job to job to get the pay I need to look after my family.**

5.2 Comparisons with other roles

There is a very strong feeling from frontline workers across Wales that their roles often compare unfavourably with higher paid roles such as social workers and housing officers, while containing many of the same responsibilities. As mentioned above 3.2, one of the key aspects that attracts many frontline workers, and keeps them motivated, is the variety and challenge of the work. However, in order to provide support to the wide variety of people and support needs they encounter, frontline workers need to have a range of detailed knowledge and skills, as well as staying up to date with policy and legislation. And yet, the pay does not compare with staff in similar roles, some of which have been able a move to from home working, while frontline housing support workers continued to go out into the community and were asked to take on additional responsibilities during the pandemic.

> **"Similar role to social workers but don't get the same level of pay."**

> **"Started as a housing officer and was paid £4k more than what I'm now on as a support worker."**

> **"Underpaid and undervalued as a sector – it's often suggested it is an unskilled job, but this is not the case. We deal with very challenging situations - clients have mental health problems, substance use issues, difficult childhood experiences, need help with benefits. I feel like an underpaid social worker."**

Another common comparison was with higher paid roles that carried much less stress and responsibility, for example working in retail, admin or as delivery drivers. Many people commented that it was difficult to recruit and retain staff to the homelessness and housing support sector when higher paid opportunities existed in sectors with less pressure, complexity and responsibility. Some people also referenced the impact of increases to the National Living Wage for other roles, stating that roles with much less stress and responsibilities are becoming equitable to support worker pay.

> **"If you work in Tesco you don't have these issues but you'll get the same pay or better pay."**

> **"Office staff are getting more money than support workers."**

> **"Better off being a delivery driver - more pay, less stress."**

> **"I always considered myself to be helpful and positive but I am exhausted [...] I can get paid more for doing track and trace. Sorry to sound so negative but this last year in particular has taken its toll on me."**

> **"[As a result of NLW increases] housekeeper wage and support worker wage are only 30p difference."**

5.3 The impact of competitive tendering

Frontline workers felt very strongly that current commissioning processes contribute to the driving down of wages as organisations are forced to compete with each other in order to secure funding from already stretched budgets. Some commented that it feels like there is 'a race to the bottom', particularly where cost is given priority over quality, with frontline worker wages being a significant casualty. This can lead to suspicion of some organisations undercutting of wages in order to compete in a tender process.

One example was given of a role being reduced from £24K a year to £19K a year for people new to the role, which due the pay discrepancy resulted in all staff being brought down to £19k a year, regardless of skills and years in the sector. Many staff fear the consequences of being moved from one service provider to work for another (TUPE) and the uncertainly this brings of having to work for a lower salary. Many members of the network called for a national minimum pay framework that would set a minimum rate of pay, effectively removing this as a variable from the commissioning process and helping to stop the race to bottom as organisations compete with each other in order to secure funding.

> **"Have seen some organisations offer lower rate of pay and are awarded the contracts, undercut others, worried I might be TUPE over onto a lower rate, would welcome a national rate of pay, and not to cut it, but increase it, or we risk losing expertise from the sector."**

> **"Squeezed salaries - the tendering process, would like to see salaries taken out of the tendering process - set a minimum salary."**

5.4 Terms and Conditions

Another consequence of stretched budgets is the downgrading of terms and conditions, with frontline workers losing shift allowances, weekend pay, Banks Holidays and overtime pay. Poor terms and conditions have pushed some frontline staff into having to do more than one job in order to be able to support their families and afford their own housing costs. Again, as with social care, this sector employs a high proportion of women, so the low pay, short- term contracts and poor terms and conditions results in further inequality.

Rising travel costs are yet a further drain on frontline workers salaries, with expenses policies not reflecting fuel price rises. As one of the few services that kept going out during the pandemic to deliver vital face to face support, this hits support workers while other services have been able to move to working from home.

> **"Need to look at whole thing - not just role and pay but support, counselling, flexi days - word gets out to staff of a good organisation and others want to work there."**

> **"Support workers don't get shift allowance, weekends, so we are seeing staff leave."**

> **"Get paid 45p a mile for travel but actual cost is much higher, plus we have to pay own business insurance, needs to be looked at."**

Recommendation:

- The WT&FG should consider the development of a national pay framework to set minimum salary levels for homelessness and housing support workers.
- The WT&FG should consider how commissioning processes could further avoid creating a 'race to the bottom' for staff salaries.
- The WT&FG should consider how terms and conditions could be improved across the sector.

6. Progression and qualifications

6.1 Progression

There was a mixed response regarding progression in the sector from frontline, with the number of opportunities for progression appearing to depend on the size on the organisation, with larger organisations such as housing associations being able to offer more in terms of career development opportunities. Others felt that they would need to leave their organisation to progress in their career, as there were a small number of managers and they were unlikely to leave soon.

However, it is important to note that not all frontline workers in the sector want to move in to management roles, with many feeling that this would take them away from the interaction with people using services. Examples were shared of workers who did gain promotions to managerial roles but missed the interaction with service users and so went back to frontline work. There was a strong feeling from some frontline workers that pay progression should not just be linked to moving into management roles, but that frontline staff should be rewarded for their years of experience, and be able to remain in frontline roles and still having some form of progression. Others felt that greater funding certainty could lead to the development of more senior roles, which retained contact with people using services, but provided an opportunity to gain skills and increased responsibility. A more nuanced approach to promotion in the sector would help to develop different career pathways to suit more workers, and would also prevent the loss of knowledge from frontline services.

The lack of clear career pathways has also resulted in some staff struggling to gain recognition for past work experience when returning to the sector after a break, rather than being able to build on their previous work in the sector, some have had to go back to the lowest pay grade when returning. As well as developing clear pathways, some form of careers advice would be useful for helping frontline workers document and gain recognition for experience gained in previous roles.

> **"I got up to senior management – but didn't like it because I missed working with the clients - so need to recognise people who work in frontline services, reward them for their knowledge and experiences so you don't lose them from the frontline."**

> **"Career wise – I haven't progressed – but I don't want to apply for managers roles – I want to work with clients, I think I could be happy staying in this role until retirement if pay reflected my work."**

> **"Manager role – weighed it up £70 more after tax, more responsibility and would take me away from my team and clients, so not much incentive to go for it, but I want progression, we all want to better ourselves but work life balance is important too."**

6.2 Qualifications

More research needs to be done to explore the role of qualifications in supporting and developing the sector. There was a mixed response from the network on this topic and a number of issues were raised which need further consideration. Many workers in the sector already have qualifications but these aren't always recognised or valued. Some people suggested that this was due to the lack of a clear qualifications framework for this sector. Others felt that their qualifications were viewed as not being directly relevant to the sector, but as with people coming from other sectors bring transferable skills, qualifications from other disciplines, such as sociology for example, can add value. The removal of financial support for staff to gain qualifications while working is a barrier for many. With low levels of pay there is little incentive to study to join the sector, and for those already in the sector, it makes paying for study inaccessible.

Some people felt that specific qualifications for the homelessness and housing support sector might be helpful for setting a minimum standard, and could help to increase recognition by other sectors as a 'profession'. However, it is important to ensure that any move towards qualification and professionalisation does not become a barrier to starting a career in support work. As with social care, the sector risks turning away people with great potential if there is too much focus on qualifications as an entry requirement. Consideration also needs to be given to any additional burden that qualifications or accreditation will place on individuals and organisations, in terms of time, capacity and cost.

> **"[My qualifications] have not made any difference to my role or how I'm perceived in my role, it won't help me advance in floating support as there are limited roles, it is more of a personal achievement."**

> **"A lot of support workers have got qualifications, the org used to support staff to do qualifications in social work but too many financial restraints now."**

Recommendation:

- The WT&FG should explore the issue of qualifications in more detail, reflecting on developments in other areas and seeking to get the right balance between providing opportunities without creating real or perceived barriers for people entering the sector

7. Trauma and support

As detailed above, work in the sector is extremely challenging; supporting people to deal with personal crises and the impact of trauma has a considerable emotional impact on staff. A support worker may spend much of their day listening to people's experiences of abuse, violence, exploitation, self harm or suicide, as they support people who are living through significant trauma. They encounter truly awful experiences, with a number of support staff telling us they have found people dead as a result of suicide, overdoses or the impact of physical health inequalities. The horror of finding someone they have been building a trusting relationship with for months, sometimes years, cannot be easily forgotten.

Support workers use high levels of empathy and trauma informed approaches when working with the people they support. However, that same duty of care is not uniformly given to frontline workers in the sector. There appears to be differing levels of support for staff depending on the organisation, with some providing very good support and others falling short.

Staff need access to a range of support that suits the individual and is ongoing. Some organisations provide access to phone helplines through their employee assistance scheme, but many of the frontline workers who spoke to us said they could not talk to an anonymous person on the phone about some of the things they have witnessed in their jobs. There was a sense that these are generic employee assistance programmes and were not equipped to support staff with the levels of vicarious trauma they experience. Many called for psychological support provided by someone independent of their organisation, but with the knowledge and experience of the trauma involved in their roles.

> **"I've seen people hanging from light fittings, found dead in properties, experienced abuse, had to perform CPR on people."**

> **"We see people we have worked with for a long time who have overdosed and died, but we're told to get on with it - there is a phone line offered – not used it, it's impersonal."**

> **"When a client was found dead, I didn't want to talk about that with someone on the end of phone who didn't know the circumstances. Would be better if there was something in house, a phone line feels like the organisation is passing the buck."**

7.1 The importance of teamwork and good leadership / management

Given the low pay and the stressful nature of the job, it can be difficult for anyone outside of the sector to understand what keeps people in these roles. It was very clear from the network that many would not be able to continue if it were not for the support of their managers and colleagues. The overwhelming majority of responses stated that the support of their co-workers and managers kept them going. It is humbling to hear the levels of commitment staff have towards each other - with some managers making themselves available 24 hours a day if staff need to contact them. However, it is clear that this way of working is not sustainable and the risks of burn out from frontline workers and managers is huge.

> **"Close bond with colleagues - we support each other through all the different work we do."**

> **"Constant frustrations in the job, I would leave the job and sector if I didn't have the support of a wonderful team, great organisation and manager, so that really buffers all the bad stuff."**

7.2 Psychologically Informed Environments

As described above, many frontline workers spoke about the psychologically informed or trauma informed approaches they take when supporting people using their services. However a truly psychologically informed approach includes the provision of reflective practice and appropriate psychological support to enable workers to reflect on some of the challenging situations they encounter and to process the vicarious trauma experienced by many.

There were differing levels of access to reflective practice from the network, but all staff who spoke acknowledged the benefits of reflective practice and wanted to see this offered to all staff as part of ongoing support. Staff working in services which include regular access to clinical supervision spoke of the positive difference it makes to them and their ability to continue to undertake their roles and support the people using their services.

It was clear that the provision of psychological support varied considerably between services. Workers were acutely aware of the cost implications of providing this type of support, and the time and capacity implications of taking time out to engage in reflective practice, clinical supervision or other forms of psychological support. It appeared as though some of the larger organisations had greater capacity or funds to provide these things, but others were unable to.

Attendees were very strongly of the view that this type of provision should be included in the Housing Support Grant contracts awarded by local authorities, that enough funding should be awarded to pay for independent clinical or psychological support for staff, as well as to cover the time for staff to engage with reflective practice.

> **"We're supposed to be able to access counsellors via an app but we are so busy and don't know how to use it, would be good to have someone in the team to help us with the emotional issues that staff face- we work with clients who have experienced domestic abuse, child protection, suicide attempts, substance use."**

> **"Feel very well supported, PIE, someone comes in every 6 weeks or more if needed to deal with issues we have."**

Recommendations:

- The WT&FG should consider how to further support and develop supportive and psychologically informed leaders and managers.
- The WT&FG should recommend that reflective practice and appropriate psychological support should be provided to all homelessness and housing support staff – and this should be fully funded through the commissioning process.

8. Recruitment and retention

8.1 Salaries and T&Cs

The two key things that frontline workers identified to address the current recruitment and retention issues faced by the sector are: salaries at the right level to attract the right people for the job, and good terms and conditions (including good levels of support for staff) to retain staff. As explained above, frontline workers felt very strongly that current salary levels do not reflect the responsibilities expected of support workers or the levels of knowledge and skills needed in the job. The insecurity of short-term contracts and the stress of annual funding applications also causes staff to move to more secure, and often less stressful sectors such as retail and hospitality.

8.2 Attracting people from outside of the sector

As highlighted at the start of this report, a number of attendees at the Frontline Network Wales meetings had come from very different professional background. However, there was a real sense that there was an untapped resource of potential support workers, who simply didn't know what the homelessness and housing support sector entails – or even know it exists. The impact of this is that the same pool of workers are simply moving around the system, securing new jobs but leaving further vacancies that need to be filled. There was some discussion about what could be done to increase awareness of the sector in order to attract more people to apply for homelessness and housing support roles and help to mitigate the recruitment issues facing so many organisations.

8.3 Job descriptions

Many of the frontline workers who spoke to us shared their frustration at inflexible and out of date job recruitment processes, including the use of job descriptions that do not reflect the realities of the job. This leads to two problems, firstly it results in a high turnover of staff as people apply for roles that in practice do not reflect the role they applied for on paper. It also acts as barrier for those already in support roles who want to apply for similar roles, because the experience they have gained in their current role does not match what is being asked for in the job descriptions.

This approach to recruitment risks overlooking potently great applicants, and further disrupts teams with high levels of staff turnover as people who are not a good fit for the realities of the job leave soon after induction. This further stretches budgets as organisations need to spend more on the recruitment process, meanwhile current staff are put under more pressure to deliver extra shifts while services are understaffed.

There needs to be a balance between a recruitment process and job descriptions that reflect the realities of job, and ensuring that people with great values and transferrable skills are not put off from applying because they feel under qualified.

> **"We're seeing the salaries are not attracting the right people suitable for the job, so we're using agency workers but it doesn't make the young people [we support] feel secure, no disrespect to the agency worker, but they don't have the connection with the young people."**

> **"Paying an appropriate wage will attract people initially but you won't keep if them if the T&Cs aren't good."**

> **"Often the role description is far removed for how we actually work - it doesn't reflect the true skills and work load and responsibilities - we have much higher responsibilities than the pieces of paper we sign up to suggests."**

Recommendations:

- The WT&FG should support the Welsh Government's planned communications campaign to attract people to work in the sector and consider what else could be done to improve recruitment and retention, beyond the recommendations above on pay, T&Cs and support for staff.
- The WT&FG should consider how recruitment processes and job descriptions could be improved to attract and retain the right people to the sector.

9. Recognition and respect

The issues around pay, conditions and a lack of a formal qualifications framework within the sector also have a negative impact on perceptions of support workers roles outside of the sector, with frontline workers experiencing a lack of respect for their work from other professions. Staff spoke of their frustrations of not being seen as valid profession by others, and of the negative impact this had on services users. Support workers develop a detailed understanding of people's experiences, but are often cut out of meetings with other services or don't feel as though their views are being listened to or respected.

Improvements in pay and the development of a framework to formally recognise the skills of support workers, along with efforts to increase understanding of their critical work could help to improve the status of the sector and improve interactions with other services.

Another issue raised by a number of attendees was the Welsh Government's Financial Recognition Scheme, as many support workers have been refused the payment, despite floating support workers being included in the original guidance.

> **"A lot of other services rely on housing - we find that social services and health board come to us for assistance – but they try to tell us how to do our jobs because they don't understand what we do."**

> **"There is a perception from statutory services that we will provide the help people need, when it should be coming from other services, our work is seen like the poor relation, it's very frustrating."**

> **"We're treated like we're bottom of the food chain - "you're only a support worker" - but I am the one who puts someone a house."**

> **"Not so much about the pay but the sense of not being appreciated, our team are great and we support each other, but things like the £500 bonus, we are now having to appeal it because we're being told that we don't do frontline work, so for me it's not the pay but the feeling of not being recognised."**

Recommendations

- WT&FG should consider how we can improve the recognition and respect for homelessness and housing support workers among other professions and sectors.

10. Next steps

Frontline workers would like their views to be considered by the Workforce Task and Finish Group and incorporated into the recommendations made to Ministers and the Housing Support National Advisory Board. If any further engagement is required, Cymorth Cymru is very happy to utilise the Frontline Network Wales to gather any further insight, through further meetings or surveys.