


Valuing our people

Katie Dalton and **Clare Budden** outline the pathway towards a resilient and valued homelessness and housing support workforce in Wales

The homelessness and housing support workforce is remarkable. Every day, these people deliver life-changing and sometimes life-saving support to thousands across Wales. Yet, they often go unseen and underappreciated.

A day in the life of a support worker is varied and unpredictable, requiring expert knowledge to respond to acute crises. They are compassionate listeners who enable people to process traumatic experiences. They build trust where system failures have left none. They navigate housing law and welfare entitlements, advocating for people within complex systems. They intervene in overdoses and suicide attempts, support people to escape from abuse and help them embark on new chapters of their lives.

THE WORKFORCE REALITY

Despite this, they do not receive the recognition, reward or support they deserve. Workers love their jobs, but low wages and the cost of living crisis mean some struggle to pay rent and put food on the table. The complexity of their roles puts them at high risk of burnout without proper support. Providers want to pay more, but services must operate within limited funding. This affects recruitment and retention, which has a real impact on people using services. When a trusting relationship is lost, it can be devastating for the person supported.

DEVELOPING THE WORKFORCE PLAN

During the development of the previous Welsh Government's Ending Homelessness Action Plan, it was clear that this workforce would be critical to achieving the goal of ending homelessness. The plan committed to developing a resilient and valued workforce, recognised for their expertise. The Ending Homelessness National Advisory Board oversaw this, establishing Task and Finish Groups to take forward key priorities.

A Workforce Task and Finish Group was established, chaired by Clare Budden, Chief Executive of ClwydAlyn, with representatives from Cymorth Cymru, support providers, local authorities and frontline workers. Our first actions included considering the views of frontline workers via the Frontline Network Wales. This shaped our workplan and led to subgroups on pay, staff support, training and qualifications and commissioning. Over three years, these subgroups engaged with the sector, conducted research and developed recommendations. These were scrutinised by the Ending Homelessness National Advisory Board and compiled into a ***final report*** sent to the Cabinet Secretary for Housing.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

The report recommended a pay increase reflecting the skill and complexity of the job. Research found comparable jobs in other sectors paid significantly more, so the report recommended pay parity with these roles. While the Welsh Government provided additional funding in recent budgets, more is needed. Last year, 58% of providers said they do not receive enough funding to cover the full cost of the Real Living Wage.

The report also recognised the trauma staff face daily and the importance of supporting them. It recommended that all services should provide reflective practice and psychological support for staff.

On training and qualifications, the report recommended a skills framework for homelessness and housing support workers to set consistent standards and highlight existing skills. We also recommended developing a specific qualification for workers in the sector.

This is only possible with right commissioning arrangements. This includes increased funding for better pay, support and training, as well as guidance and grant conditions to ensure these are built into service expectations.

A CALL TO THE NEW GOVERNMENT

We believe this report sets out a pathway towards a resilient and valued workforce. With the Senedd election delivering a new Welsh Government, the baton passes to Plaid Cymru to take the next steps.

In their manifesto, Plaid committed to a Fair Work First approach to public sector grants and contracts. They also committed to tackling homelessness by taking a Housing First, trauma-informed and person-centred approach. As outlined, this can only be achieved by ensuring the workforce is recognised, rewarded and supported for their life-changing work.

We are ready to work with the new government to deliver the next steps towards this ambition.

Katie Dalton is the Director of Cymorth Cymru. Clare Budden is Chair of the Workforce Task and Finish Group



