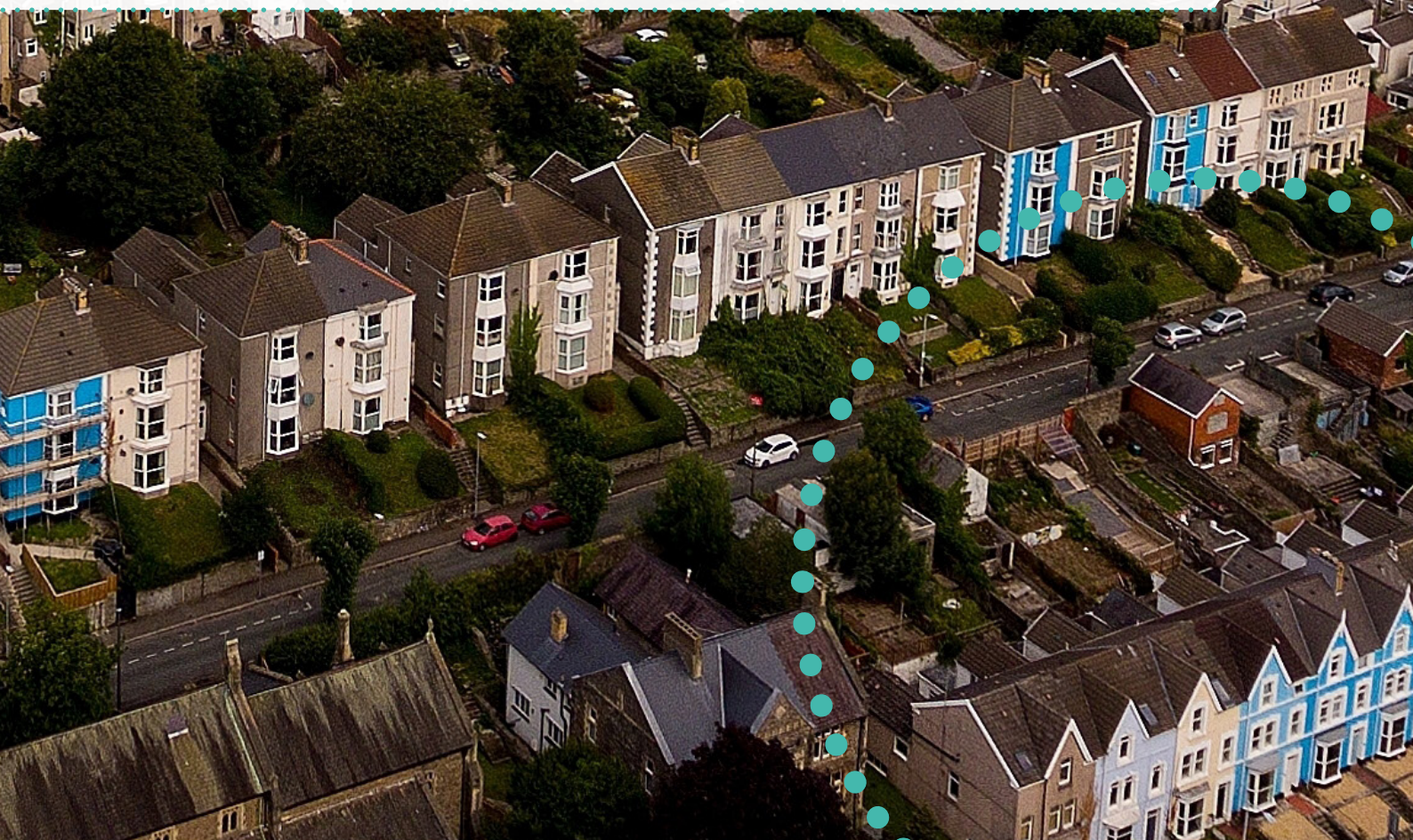




Sector Snapshot. Survey of housing professionals in Wales



Foreword

We have now received the results from the latest in our series of surveys of frontline housing professionals across Wales. Thank you to everyone who took the time to complete it. We value your views which have informed this sector snapshot.

It is encouraging to see that the majority of respondents to our survey are motivated to work in housing as they wanted to help people, make a difference and have a positive impact on the community. There was also significant value attached to the sense of purpose that working in housing gave them.

The survey was undertaken during a time of reflection and analysis for the sector following the tragic death of Awaab Ishak. This was closely followed by the publication in England of the Better Social Housing Review (BSHR). One of the key recommendations of the BSHR was that the Chartered Institute of Housing (CIH) should promote the traditional housing officer role.

The survey asked for views on what a traditional housing officer role should look like. Many see this role as the first point of contact for tenants on a wide range of issues from money advice to help with Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) issues. Smaller patch sizes were noted as important to enable housing officers to know the individuals living in their area and provide timely targeted support when needed. Respondents also stated that it is vital that housing officers are visible to tenants and residents.

If we are to meet the vision of what a traditional housing officer looks like there needs to be a shift to the current working environment which is defined by high workloads, lack of resource and communication. There are concerns that the lack of staff can mean a diluted service and not enough time to manage caseloads meaning a review of how to improve services was unlikely due to being in crisis mode every day. Respondents noted that by increasing the workforce, workloads would become more manageable and there would be opportunities to explore four day weeks to improve work life balance. There is also a need to provide greater recognition for the work that housing professionals working directly with individuals undertake.

We all know there are significant issues and challenges to the housing sector. We have increasing levels of homelessness, a significant lack of affordable housing, and building standards need addressing. Yet without people working in our organisations, we cannot address these challenges. There is a need to invest in our workforce, making those who work in housing feel

valued and respected. We must highlight and promote housing as a rewarding career with adequate support and a good work life balance.

The survey has provided some key questions for housing leaders to consider:

- Do we need to reassess and change our housing officer roles to get the most out of our workforce and provide the best support to our tenants?
- How can we ensure resources, including time, are provided at a sufficient level?
- Is promoting housing as a career needed to improve recruitment?
- How do we ensure communication both within and outside our organisations is effective? Including highlighting good practice.

We know these conversations are already happening within organisations but for meaningful change this needs to be a sector wide conversation, to encourage positive change, growth and inspire others by sharing good practice. Let's all get involved and discuss the positive impact changes made have had on staff and tenants.

Thank you for reading and please share this report. We'd like to hear your views so please get in touch, by emailing cerys@cih.org, to share feedback and ideas.

Gareth Leech

Chair, Housing Futures Cymru



Survey Analysis

Our survey received 84 responses. The respondents worked for the following:

- 57 per cent for a local authority
- 42 per cent for a housing association
- One per cent for a private landlord.

Respondents has various roles from housing support and homelessness officers to housing officers and development officers. We also received responses from those working in human resource and governance roles.

The report sets out some of the key trends in the responses received.

What motivates you to work within the housing sector?

The primary motivation for working in the sector was to make a difference with 85 per cent of respondents stating their motivation was a desire to help people and have a positive impact on the community.

There was a desire to help those vulnerably housed, facing homelessness or those who had become homeless. Respondents also stated they valued the sense of purpose that working in housing gave them.

"It's an interesting job with so many aspects to it. I enjoy being able to help those who do not know where to look for help or that there is help out there, it's about improving people's lives"

"To see change. The belief that everyone has the right to a home, "Love where you live" It gives me joy when you can assist someone to find a home that is suitable and affordable."



What single change in the way your organisation approaches your service area could improve the impact you can make?

The main change needed to improve the impact of the sector was to provide more resources to services. These resources were financial as well as giving more time to staff to undertake their role which some felt could be achieved by employing more staff to share the workloads.

Another common theme was the need for better communication within organisations and with partner organisations. Respondents felt that better communication would not only improve the service provided to tenants but ensure staff were equipped to undertake their varied and often complex roles.

"Increase service delivery in line with the enormous impact of Housing Act 2016, current financial and housing crisis and the reduction of property available to rent due to the sale of rental properties".

"Give us more time to provide interventional support for our tenants to allow them to remain independent and in their own home for as long as possible."

"Develop integrated solutions and teams with partner authorities and providers including police, health and the third sector (possibly through arm's length organisations)."



What changes in your individual role could be made to help with your wellbeing and motivation?

Some respondents highlighted that their organisations are very good at looking after the wellbeing of staff and felt that there were no improvements needed at this time. Yet for many respondents changes were needed to help with their wellbeing. The changes outlined were:

- Introducing a four-day week to help with work life balance
- A larger workforce to share the workload which is large and increasing
- Being thanked for the work they do
- More recognition of the work they undertake
- Pay equity across the sector where similar roles are paid the same across organisations.

"Recent changes have improved my work life balance, working from home, recent pay rise, and good terms and conditions."

"Additional staff in my service area would help my stress and anxiety levels which in turn would improve my mental health, wellbeing and improve my motivation."

"The demand on our service and increased so much in the past three years and cases are far more complex. A shorter working week of four days working and having three days off would allow officers to get some quality down time. We are listening to people who are in crisis all day and having shorter working week would enable staff to have a better balance and more energy to face the new working week."

"More one to one time with managers - tell me I'm doing a good job. Face to face rather than teams."



A recommendation of the Better Social Housing Review states the Chartered Institute of Housing (CIH) should promote the traditional 'housing officer' role. In your own opinion, what do you think a traditional 'housing officer' role should do?

Most respondents saw the traditional housing officer role as one where housing officers are the first point of contact for a tenant. This means that a housing officer provides support, offers financial advice, and deals with any anti-social behaviour. Respondents highlighted that this depended on knowing your tenants well with some suggesting this would only be possible with smaller patch sizes.

"Be a single point of contact for any tenancy related issues. Make yourself known to your tenants and give them means of contacting you directly. Signpost to the correct support when required. Act swiftly on any information that indicates something may be going wrong."

"Housing officers should know their 'patch' and who is living on their 'patch' they should know the families and arrange visits regularly- properties should be checked - so any issues in the properties identified, rent accounts should be checked and measures put into place to assist those families in financial difficulties. Housing officers should also be tenancy support officers - it should be one role so things do not get missed."

"A 'traditional housing officer' should manage a smaller area but have greater visibility of their patch. Weekly walk arounds of estates, engagement with residents, community surgeries."



What do you feel are the key pressures or barriers for you in your job role, or things affecting your organisation?

The key pressure for respondents was their workload, with 43 per cent stating this was an issue for them. Workload issues were attributed to low staff levels, the high level of cases, rising demand for services and staff retention due to pressure of the role.

Financial concerns were a key pressure for 30 per cent of respondents. This was linked to the cost of living crisis increasing demands on services and services struggling financially which also impacted workloads.

Some respondents cited issues with communication with other organisations impacting on timely responses to tenants needs or accessing services.

"The sheer demand for the work my team does. As the team provides money advice, referrals have soared due to the cost of living crisis. My team (and myself) spend all day supporting people who are very distressed, it is emotionally taxing."

"Financial restraints meaning that resources are at their lowest. Due to wages getting the right people in to positions is made difficult."

"Short staffed meaning not enough time to review and develop current services."

"Homeless duty days add extra pressures to the role. Poor communication with other agencies, having to follow up work. I would like to see one database, where all agencies can access this with GDPR permission from the client."

"Money - we put our rents sky high but don't get the staff to cover all the work - this creates a diluted service."

Thank you for your time and interest in this report.

If you would like to discuss any of the themes or topics further, or provide feedback on this report please contact the report authors:



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