



Chartered
Institute of
Housing
Cymru

2024 SECTOR SNAPSHOT:

SURVEY OF HOUSING PROFESSIONALS IN WALES

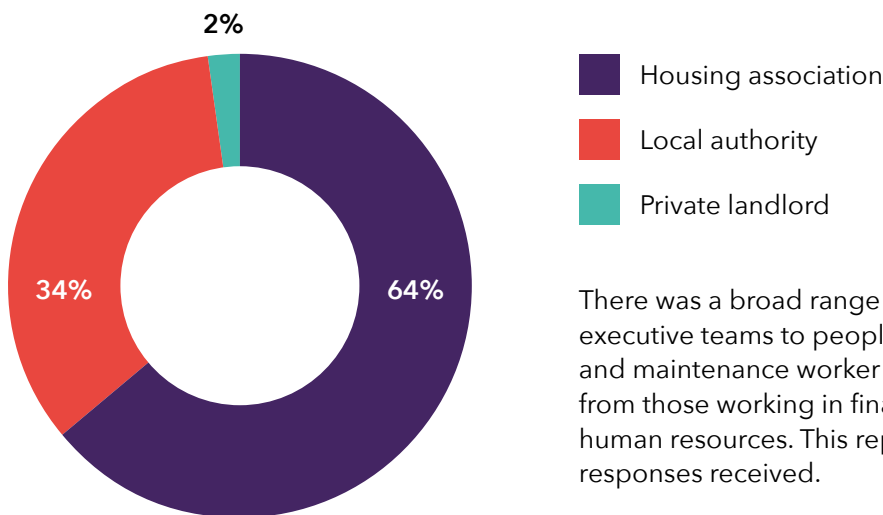
October 2024

Introduction

This report outlines the findings of our latest snapshot survey of housing professionals in Wales, analysing the lived experience of those working on the frontline in housing management roles.

It outlines what housing professionals need to relieve the pressures they identify, alongside examining what can be done to tackle homelessness in Wales. This survey also asked respondents to identify the most effective measure the Welsh Government should undertake to resolve the housing crisis.

The survey ran for eight weeks during the 2024 summer recess and received a total of 181 responses. The respondents work in the following identified areas:



There was a broad range of respondents from members of executive teams to people in housing officers, support workers and maintenance worker roles. We also received responses from those working in finance teams, governance, and human resources. This report sets out the key trends from the responses received.

Executive summary

As with previous surveys, the majority of respondents stated that their primary motivation for working in the housing sector is to make a positive difference in people's lives.

When asked about housing priorities and how they believed homelessness could be solved, a common response identified the need for an increased supply of affordable homes and adequate support for individuals to be able to sustain their tenancy. Despite this the majority of respondents were not confident that the current target of building 20,000 low carbon social homes this Senedd term would be met. This was due to a lack of funding for the programme, together with planning constraints and skills shortages.

These funding constraints coupled with ongoing policy changes were identified as key pressures faced by housing professionals. Some respondents highlighted that the rate of change to the housing system in Wales needs to be realistic. Some local authority respondents noted that a lot is being asked of them in tight time frames and it was noted that often those asking for the change have little knowledge of the practical realities of how things work in an operational setting. More resources are needed to ease the pressure faced as a result of the pace of change the Welsh Government wants.

Housing professionals working in local authorities reported a greater detrimental impact on their mental health and wellbeing because of funding cuts and policy changes compared to those working within housing associations. Respondents did state that their organisations were providing support for their mental health and wellbeing, although some did not take up this support as there were concerns over confidentiality.

Respondents were resoundingly clear in their asks of the Welsh Government. They want more funding and for Welsh Government to be realistic when rolling out new legislation and policies. Some went further and stated that housing should be the top priority for government and that it is time for housing to be put front and centre.

Survey findings

What motivates you to work within the housing sector?

The primary motivation for working in the housing sector was to make a difference, with 77 per cent of respondents stating that they worked in housing to help people and make a difference in their lives. Others highlighted the job security that housing gave them, being motivated by a desire to end homelessness, and the belief that housing should be a right for everyone.

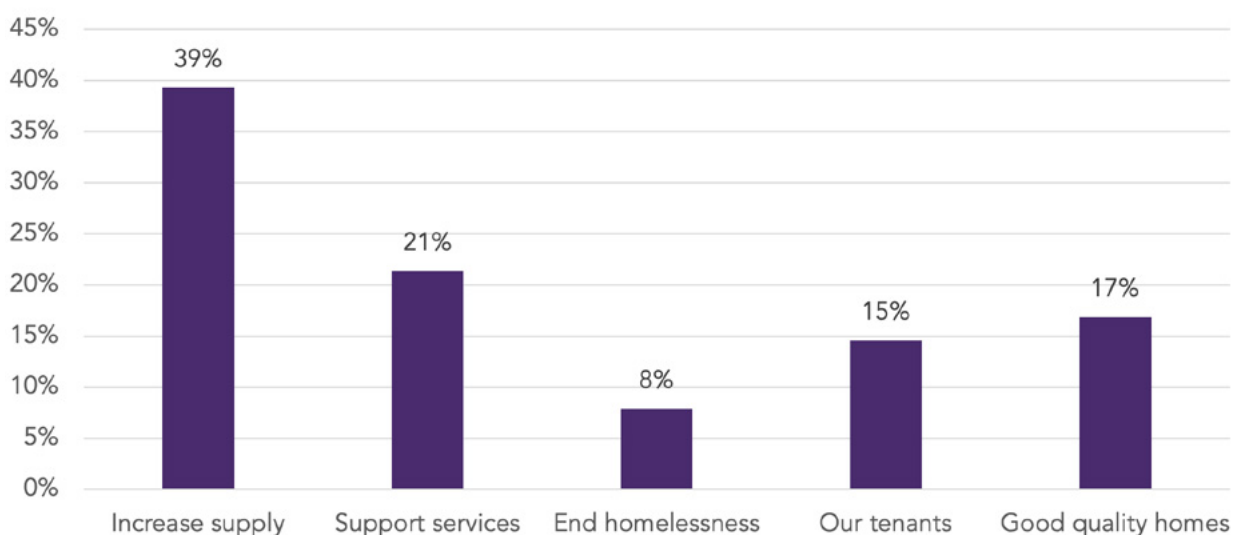
"To help to provide good quality homes that tenants can be proud of and help to ensure those in most need get the help they need."

"The ability to make a difference to people's lives, to ensure people are adequately housed, to provide thriving communities. Give disadvantaged and vulnerable people a stable home and support network."

What is the number one housing priority for you?

Increasing the supply of social homes was the main housing priority for 39 per cent of respondents. Providing support services to ensure that tenants can maintain their home and thrive within their communities, also featured prominently as an important factor. All priorities are outlined in figure one.

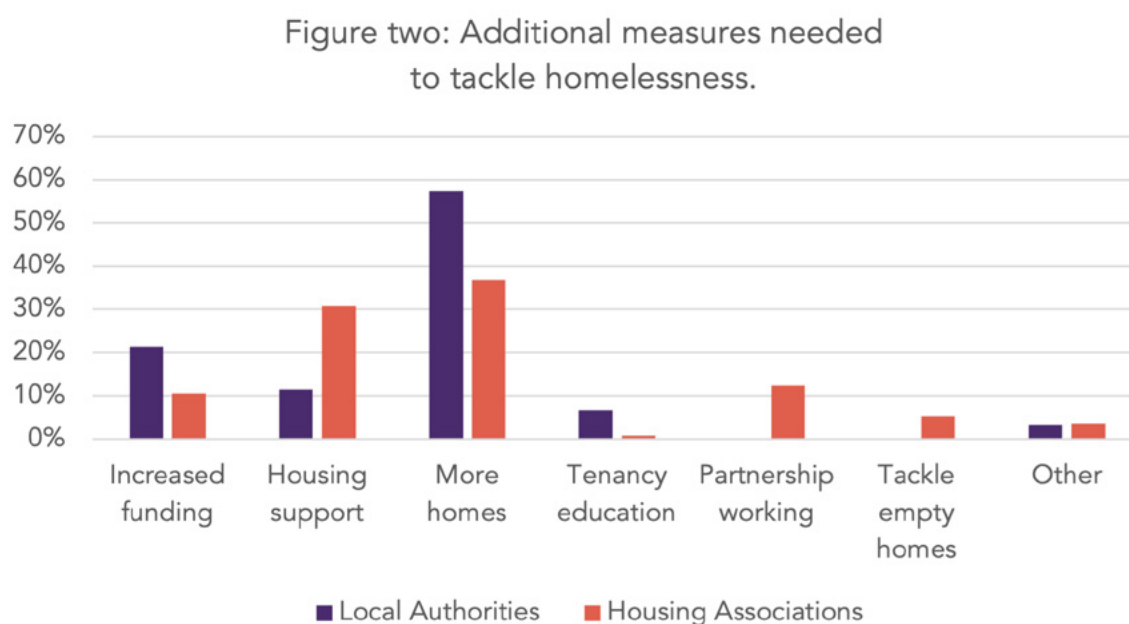
Figure one: The main housing priority for respondents



"Supply. No amount of change to legislation is going to end homelessness - what we need is a sufficient supply of homes for everyone who needs it. This doesn't mean just self-contained but good quality and well managed house shares."

What additional measures do you think are needed to adequately tackle homelessness in Wales?

The majority of respondents, in both housing associations and local authorities, stated more homes were needed to adequately tackle homelessness in Wales. The results showed that respondents from housing associations believed greater support to help people maintain a tenancy is required to tackle homelessness. Figure two sets out all the measures respondents identified to adequately tackle homelessness.



There was a broad consensus amongst respondents that the main size of homes required are one bed properties and, in some areas, larger family homes with four or more bedrooms.

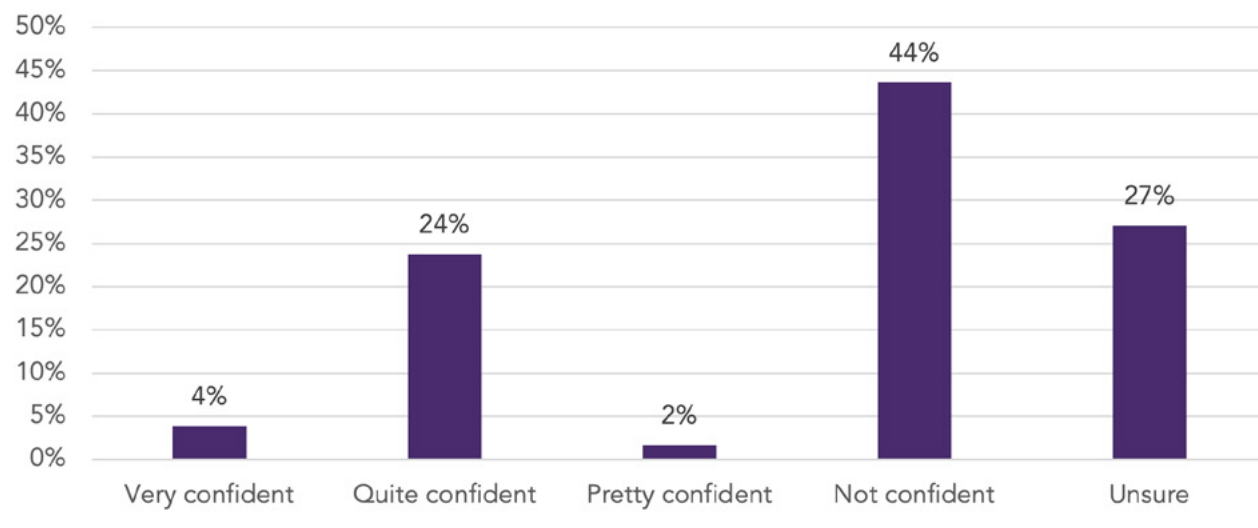
"Building of four+ bedroomed properties to house larger/blended families. This is something local authorities rarely accept planning permission for, however in the majority of cases it would free up smaller properties for re-let."

"We need to build more one bed properties"

How confident are you in the housing sector meeting the Welsh Government's target of building 20,000 low carbon social homes by March 2026?

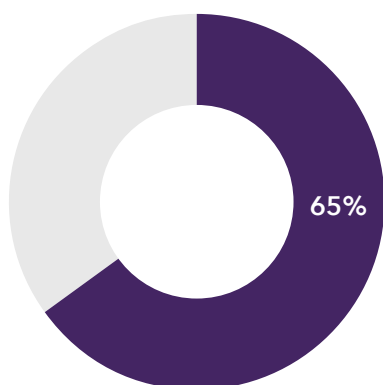
As shown in figure three, the majority of respondents (71 per cent) are not confident or unsure that the Welsh Government's target of 20,000 low carbon social homes will be met.

Figure three: Level of confidence in meeting the 20,000 social homes target

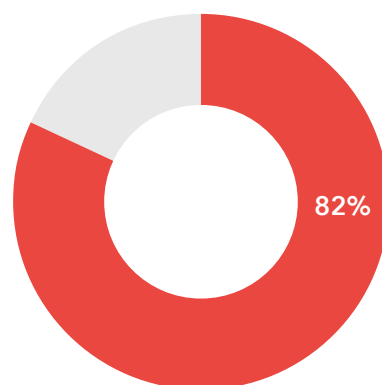


We further examined the level of confidence within local authorities and housing associations separately and found that:

65 per cent of respondents from a housing association are not confident or unsure the target will be met



82 per cent of respondents from a local authority are not confident or unsure the target will be met.

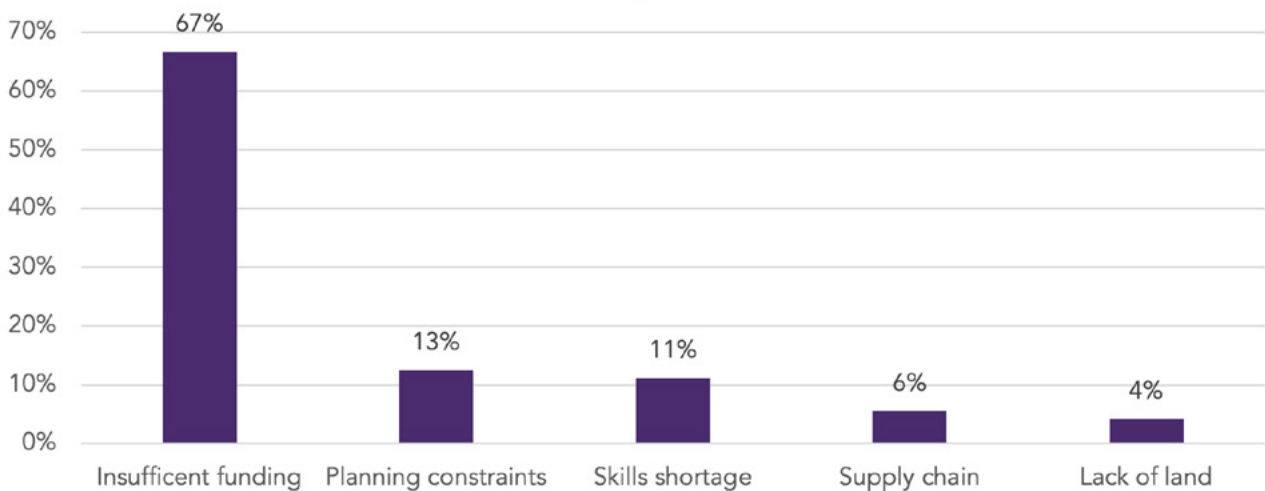


When looking at the level of seniority of respondents within their organisations, the results highlighted that 70 per cent of respondents who were in a senior leadership position were not confident that the target would be met.

What are your reasons for your level of confidence in meeting the Welsh Government's target of building 20,000 low carbon social homes by March 2026?

Whilst there is acknowledgement in the responses that record funding levels have been provided to develop new homes, respondents reported that more funding will be needed to meet the target. This is due to other pressures on budgets such as WHQS 2023. Figure four provides a breakdown of the reasons for a lack of confidence and uncertainty in meeting the 20,000 low carbon social homes target.

Figure four: Reasons for lack of confidence in meeting 20,000 social homes target.



Although we hear anecdotal evidence about the impact planning constraints and skills shortages are having on development in Wales, just over one in ten respondents cited these issues as reasons for their level of confidence. Yet the narrative in responses provided some additional context about the impact this is having on developing homes together with the funding constraints.

"It's hard because there are a lot of delays in the development process at present (planning being a huge one). Therefore, the time it takes from identifying land to practical completion, is on average four years"

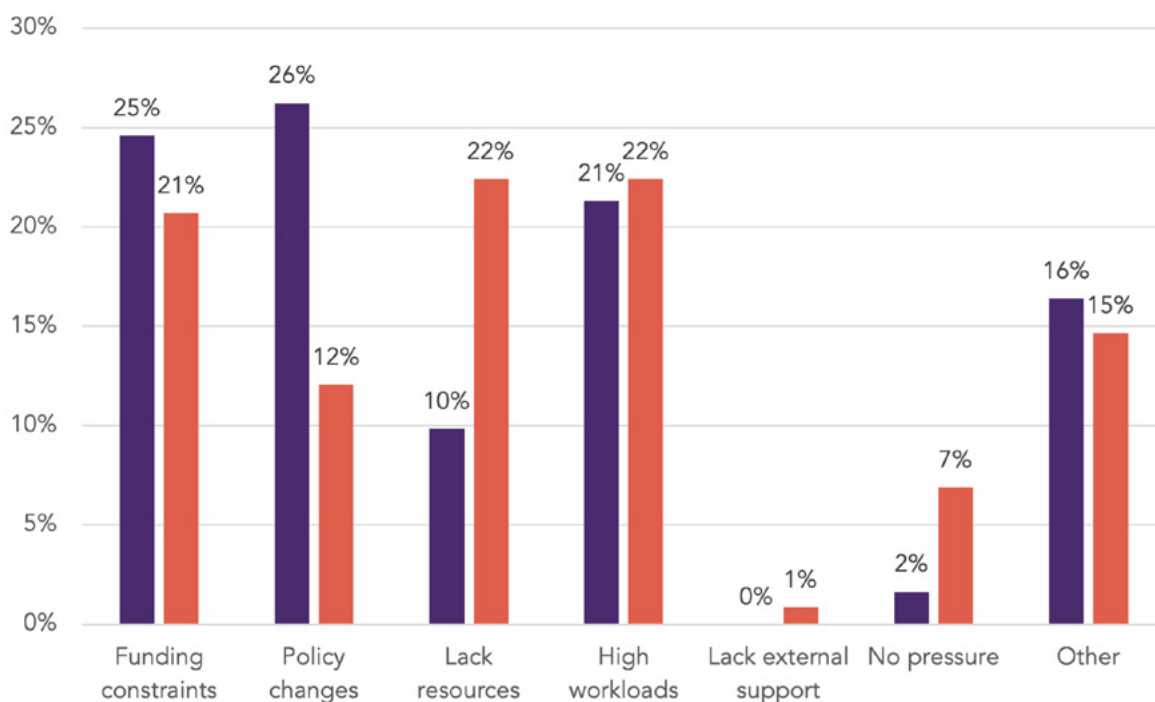
"Record levels of investment, but there are still challenges around land availability, planning delays and rising costs of materials. Other sector pressures such as WHQS 2023 will also result in increased financial pressures on landlords. Only around 6,000 properties have been delivered since 2021 so meeting 20,000 is likely to be extremely challenging given other influencing factors."

"Housing associations are stretched with decarbonisation and Welsh Housing Quality Standards 2023. Costs have increased significantly. There is a skills shortage due to a lack of historical investment in the workforce and a lack of funding to explore modern methods of construction."

What are some of the current pressures you are facing in your role?

Just over a fifth (21 and 22 per cent) of housing professionals in local authorities and housing associations are facing pressure due to high workloads. This is significantly lower than the 43 per cent of respondents in the [Sector Snapshot: Survey of housing professionals in Wales 2023](#). Yet financial concerns and a lack of resources are at similar levels this year to 2023, with the lack of resources in 2024 having a larger impact on those working within housing associations. The results show those working in local authorities are more likely to feel pressure due to policy changes.

Figure five: Current pressures



Nearly one in ten housing professionals in housing associations state they are not under any pressure compared to just two per cent of housing professionals in local authorities.

Some respondents commented that ongoing mergers were increasing their workloads.

"We are currently going through a merger which has brought additional work pressures."

There were further comments on the impact of staff shortages, delays within the planning system and the impact of policy changes on the local authority workforce.

"The delays associated with planning applications due to the lack of resources in the local authorities are causing huge pressures. We are also struggling with the lack of contractors available to build a scheme."

"Backlog of work due to staff shortages. Pay is low and staff are not motivated as drowning in work and not even rehousing anyone."

"With regard to Welsh Government expectations, the rate of desired change needs to more realistic, too much is being asked of LAs in short periods of time and often, changes are simply imposed, leaving staff feeling overwhelmed by the pace, frustrated, as it is sometimes obvious that new policies will never work, or will be difficult to implement as the authors have little operational experience in some areas of housing work and exposed to criticism from local communities who cannot understand why some changes are being made."

How would you address some of these pressures?

Respondents from both local authorities and housing associations were clear more funding is needed to ease some of the pressures. There is also a need to increase the workforce as high workloads and size of caseloads were significantly impacting people, leaving some feeling that they are now at breaking point. Some noted that an increase in staff is unlikely to happen as funding keeps being reduced.

"We have had budgets cut year after year and whilst our workload is increasing, we are not having any additional resources. We need additional resources. We have had the implementation of the Renting Homes Wales Act which has meant we have had to make so many changes which has had a great impact on staff and morale."

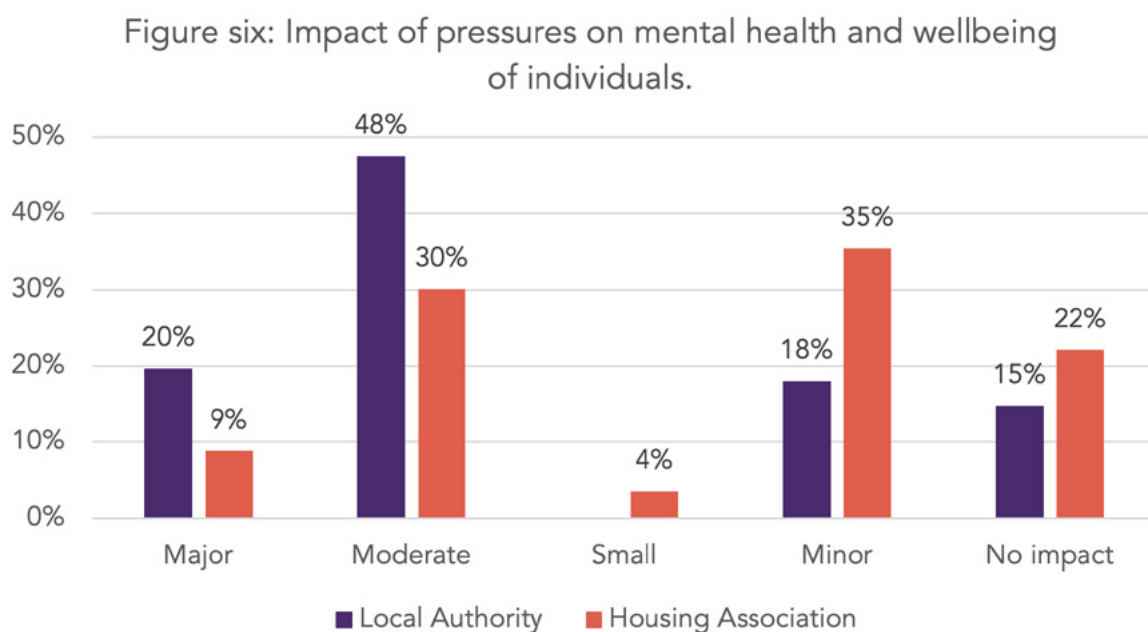
"We need to future proof our business with young, skilled, eager professionals but year after year we are being told we cannot increase resources. Caseloads for officers are reaching breaking point and we cannot offer the quality service we once did, despite staff trying their best. Just like the NHS, we are at breaking point. We also have an ageing workforce; staff cannot work to the pace they were working at and cannot retire due to the increase in state pension age."

"We cannot change government policy overnight, so we have to find the best way to work around the policies. The high workload is a real issue - we have been facing this for some years now and have stripped back provision where possible, there isn't a lot more than can be stripped back. Best case scenario would be additional staff, but this is unlikely."

What impact are these pressures having on your mental health and wellbeing?

The pressures faced by housing professionals are having a larger impact on the mental health and wellbeing of individuals working within local authorities, with 20 per cent stating there is a major impact on their mental health and wellbeing. In addition, 48 per cent of respondents working in a local authority state the pressures are having a moderate impact on their mental health and wellbeing.

For housing association respondents, 9 per cent state there is a major impact and 30 per cent state there is a moderate impact. This supports what we have been hearing from the sector about the impact the increased pressures are having on the workforce especially for those who work in local authorities. Figure six provides a full breakdown.



Respondents were asked to provide more detail about the impact the pressures were having on their mental health and wellbeing. These comments centred around struggles to balance workloads, fears around job losses, vicarious trauma, and impact on mental health within teams.

"High caseloads and traumatic stories from the most vulnerable are having a massive impact on staff wellbeing"

"Stress levels are high within the office so staff are often off work on the sick which impacts negatively on the staff that are in the office as have to do double the workload."

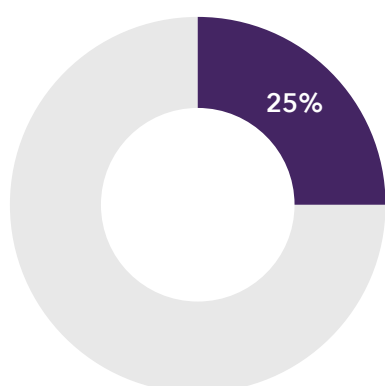
"I don't always earn enough to cover my bills, leading to stress at home. I am also worried about some of the people I am forced to house, as I am putting them next to vulnerable people that they shouldn't be housed next to, but as they are living in temporary accommodation so I don't have a choice."

"The role is stressful. All the legislative reform falls on the local authority to manage with little additional financial support from Welsh Government. All local authorities are under huge budgetary pressures - this is fed down to every front-line officer who feels between a rock and a hard place, trying to fulfil statutory duties with no resources"

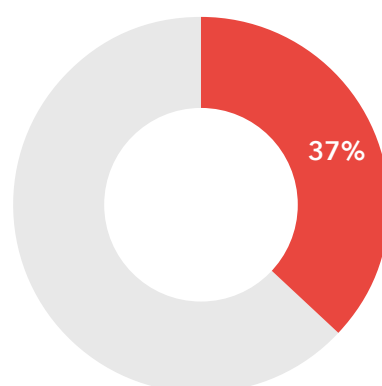
Are there any other factors negatively impacting your mental health and wellbeing?

It is perhaps not surprising that for some respondents there were other factors that were also impacting their mental health and wellbeing. The proportion per type of organisation were:

25 per cent of housing association respondents



37 per cent of local authority respondents

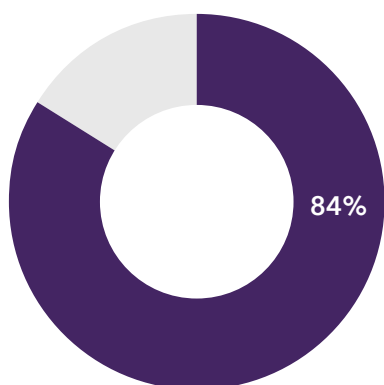


Other factors included family health issues, financial pressures due to the cost-of-living crisis, job insecurity due to short term contracts and feeling that they should be doing more to help those who approach their service.

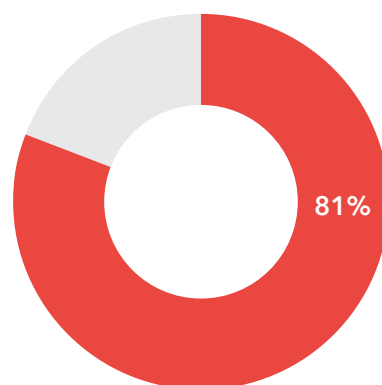
Is your organisation providing support for your mental health and wellbeing?

It is encouraging to see that the majority of respondents stated that their organisation does provide support for their mental health and wellbeing with findings showing this to be the case for:

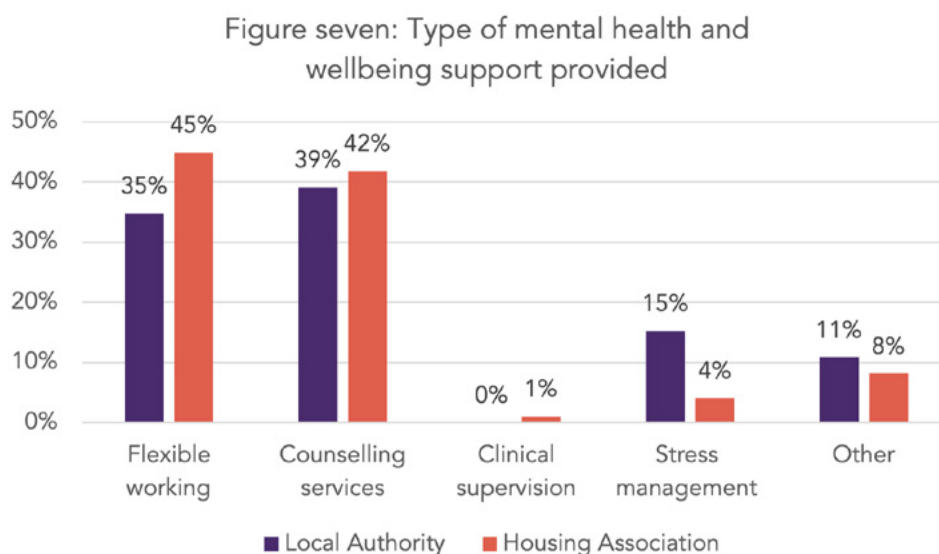
84 per cent of housing association respondents



81 per cent of local authority respondents



The type of support that is being provided is outlined in figure seven.



Those respondents working within a housing association are more likely to have access to flexible working and counselling services than those working in a local authority. Local authority respondents have more access to services that help with stress management though this may be reflective to the higher proportion of respondents whose mental health is impacted by the pressures they face.

Some respondents provided some narrative around the support they are receiving.

"We have a Wellbeing team that I am part of, and we organise wellbeing days where no one is expected to work. Flexibility is so appreciated within this company."

"We have a specific 'wellbeing group which actively promotes mental health and wellbeing through various platforms. We hold wellbeing days throughout the year for staff."

There were some respondents who stated that whilst there was help and support available, they would not use it as they were not sure how anonymous the service would be.

What factors are having a positive impact on your mental health and wellbeing?

This question was not limited to their work, enabling respondents to include factors outside of work that have a positive impact. For the majority of respondents, flexible working and the ability to effectively balance work and home life was the main positive impact. This was closely followed by knowing they could rely on and be supported by their team.

"I am working a compressed hours week, so 37 hours over 4 days which gives me a longer weekend and therefore more time to relax and pursue my interests."

"The flexible working hours. Having a very supportive manager and team, this comes right from the top."

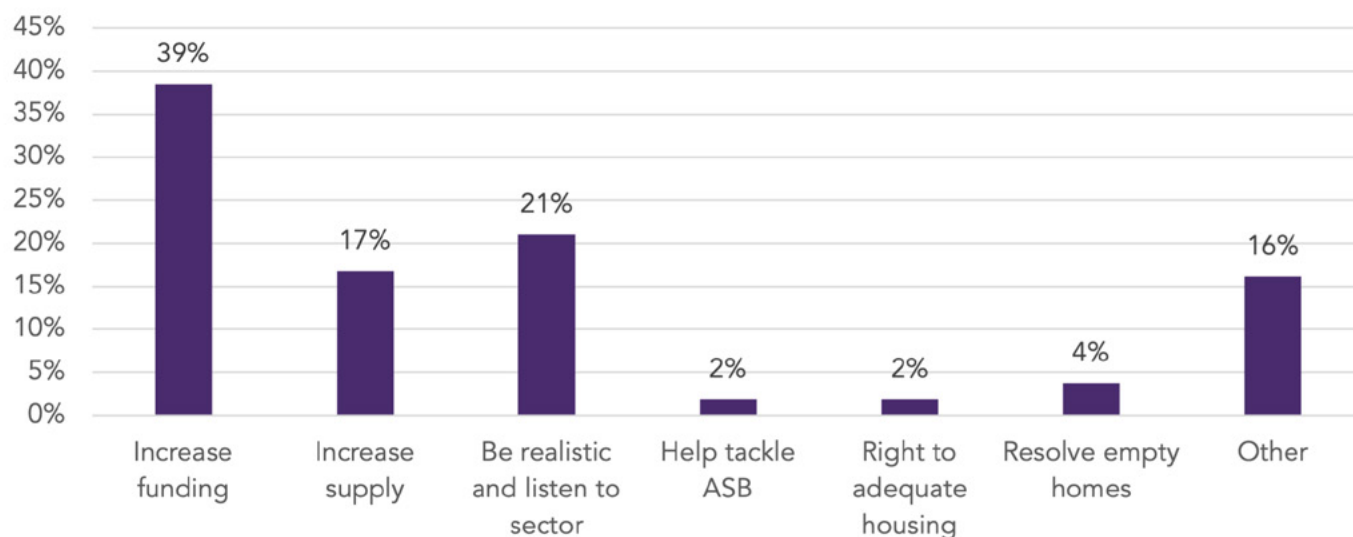
"Working with a great team and an understanding line manager, also having flexible working hours to work arrange appointments/family life."

"Team spirit ... new challenges and learning new skills ... supervision and having one-to-one support with your manager to offload stresses or worries."

What is the one thing you would ask the Welsh Government to do in relation to housing?

The vast majority of respondents want the Welsh Government to increase funding across a range of services and initiatives. This includes house building, decarbonising existing housing stock and ensuring the right levels of people can be employed by organisations.

Figure eight: One thing Welsh government can do in relation to housing



As shown in figure eight, 21 per cent of respondents wanted the Welsh government to be realistic in what it is asking the sector to do in regard to policy changes and conflicting priorities and to listen when the sector raises issues with proposed policy changes.

"Be realistic in what they are asking when rolling out new legislation or policies etc."

"Engage with multiple organisations across the sector before implementing huge changes, the changes are always well meaning from Welsh Government but often poorly thought out."

"Develop an organised project team to look at sourcing suitable, sustainable and cost-effective single person accommodation as the demand for this increased greatly since Covid-19"

Some reflections

It is once again clear that people work in housing because they want to make a difference in people's lives and the communities they work within. Yet, a lack of funding, conflicting priorities for the monies available, policy changes and a shortage of staff resource in the sector is having a real impact on the mental health and wellbeing of housing professionals.

For some this pressure comes from the Welsh Government itself, who respondents say is implementing policy change without fully engaging the sector or/and does not fully understand the operational side of housing. This, coupled with a lack of funding to ensure a sufficient sized workforce to deliver services is adding significant levels of pressure on housing teams, resulting in some now being at breaking point. We need to adequately fund the sector and ensure that the workforce is at a level where it can effectively deliver statutory housing services and policy changes, with minimal impact on the mental health and wellbeing of housing professionals.

Now is the time to invest in the housing workforce to ensure it is sufficiently resourced to deliver the wider piece of work required to resolve the housing crisis in Wales. As summed up by one respondent, now is the time to put housing front and centre. Adequately resourcing the housing workforce must be central to this endeavour.

"Housing is not an after-thought. This should be one of the top priorities in Wales and in the UK. With the right housing available, the need for social and health services may be lessened. It's time housing is put front and centre."



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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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