Skills for the housing officer of the future

Martin Haddelsey
Learning Development Officer
Chartered Institute of Housing
Introductions

• Martin Haddelsey

• ‘Learning Development Officer’
What this session will cover

1. Motivations for entering the social/affordable housing sector

2. Is housing a profession, or an occupation?

3. The changing operating environment

4. How housing organisations could - or should - respond

5. Competencies required to work in a frontline housing role in the current environment
Group task 1

• Please spend a few minutes speaking to the person next to you

• Why did they enter the housing sector?

• Be ready to feed back to the group (we won’t do everyone!)
Motivations for entering housing

• Did you ‘fall’ into housing?

• Or was it a conscious career choice?

• Even if you fell in, did you then carve out a career and identify with the values of the sector?

• Is it just a job to you, or do you think of yourself as an aspiring professional?
Routes into housing management

- **Pragmatists**
  Those that ‘fell’ into housing

- **Pro-activists**
  Those that went into housing as a ‘personally worthwhile and socially useful’ career

- **Which are you?**
Pragmatists

- Housing is ‘just a job’
- Interested in practical aspects of the job and security of employment
- Emphasize the importance of common-sense over knowledge
- Tend to be happy to remain in frontline positions – don’t want to engage with ‘management speak’
- May be of a different generation to younger, more ambitious colleagues
- May have fewer formal qualifications
Pro-activists

- Interested in a career
- Interested in status
- Keen sense of themselves as ‘housing professionals’
- May see housing as a springboard to managerial careers in other sectors
- May have family backgrounds rooted in public service
- Some may see housing as a vehicle for social change – political motivation
Group task 2

- Please spend a few minutes speaking to the person next to you.

- Do you think housing management is a ‘profession’? And do you think of yourself as a ‘professional’?

- Be ready to feed back to the group (we may not have time to cover everyone!)
Housing: profession or occupation?

• “A paid occupation, especially one that involves prolonged training and a formal qualification, e.g.:

- *his chosen profession of teaching*
- *He was a barrister by profession*

[www.oxforddictionaries.com](http://www.oxforddictionaries.com)
“Housing knowledge? Well, I don’t think there’s anything you could call purely housing knowledge, is there?...I mean it’s lots of different things, but nothing in great detail. Some bits of law...a bit of building tech, housing finance, these sorts of things.”

(Local authority housing officer)

(Casey & Allen, 2004)
Housing: profession or occupation?

• Claims made by housing workers that housing is a profession have been undermined by this lack of a specialist body of knowledge

• Critics have argued that they use generic knowledge and common-sense, instead

• They’ve also argued that housing work does not require the same level of ‘professional judgement’ as other spheres of work
Housing: profession or occupation?

• Does (arguably) possess other attributes of professions:
  • Task-complexity
  • Altruistic service
  • Formal educational and entry requirements (at least at senior levels)
  • Professional codes of conduct

• But NOT obligatory membership of a professional body...

• Do you agree that housing management satisfies these criteria?
Group task 3 – the changing operating environment

• In small groups...

• ...rank the following external drivers which are changing the frontline housing officer role, with ‘1’ as the strongest driver, and ‘6’ as the weakest

• Be ready to feed back to the group!
Group task 3 – the changing operating environment

- Income reduction for landlords (rent and subsidy cuts)
- Gap between earnings and housing costs
- Housing supply
- Welfare reform (‘bedroom tax’, universal credit, LHA applied to social housing HB claimants, etc.)
- Increased commercial focus (‘for profit’ activities; home ownership products)
- Cuts to support services, local authority and third-sector
The changing operating environment

• Survey respondents for the CIH/Wheatley Group Report ‘Frontline Futures’ (2014) rated the following 3 factors as having the biggest influence:

1. Welfare reform
2. Housing supply
3. Increasing gap between earnings and housing costs
How could - or should – housing organisations respond?

• Questions to consider...

• Should housing workers fill the gaps left by closing or stretched support services?

• If so, what type and level of support should they provide?

• If not, then should we be lowering the expectations of our tenants?
How could - or should – housing organisations respond?

• Questions to consider...

• Should we provide resilience training / counselling for increasingly stressed frontline workers?

• How do we equip staff to respond to a more commercial environment?

• Who do we recruit, and what training should we provide for staff?
Group task 4 - competencies required to work in a frontline housing role

• Small group discussion

• Given these challenges, which ‘competencies’ do you consider to be most important for the frontline housing officer in the current environment (‘competencies’ include skills, attributes & knowledge)

• Try to come up with at least 3

• Be ready to feed back to the group!
Competencies required to work in a frontline housing role (in no particular order)

- **Skills/attributes**
  - Ability to problem solve
  - Ability to manage change
  - Creative & flexible
  - Customer focused
  - Resilience
  - Good communicator
  - Negotiation skills
  - A ‘can do’ attitude
  - Commercially minded

- **Knowledge**
  - Performance management
  - Regulatory requirements
  - Housing law
  - Housing policy
  - Internal policies/procedures
  - Leasehold management/shared ownership/home ownership
Competencies for the future

• Ability to manage change

• Commercially minded

• Creativity and flexibility

• A ‘can do’ attitude
Skills for the future

• Martin Haddelsey

• Learning Development Officer (CIH Housing Academy)