



Chartered
Institute of
Housing
Cymru

Joining the dots in local authorities housing departments

Local Government Housing Professionals Survey Report



Executive Summary

Our research uncovered a range of findings reflecting the experience and insights of housing professionals working within local authorities. These included:

- An overwhelming majority support the introduction of a right to adequate housing in Wales
- Two thirds felt their local authority do recognise housing's role in creating sustainable communities
- The vast majority felt increasing the supply of affordable housing as being a priority within their local authority
- People work in housing roles within local authorities to help people, but workload, staff shortages and stress risk undermining this desire

Why did we do this survey?

Our purpose is to contribute to debates, policy and the legislative agenda about housing in Wales, and we are informed by the experiences of people from across Wales.

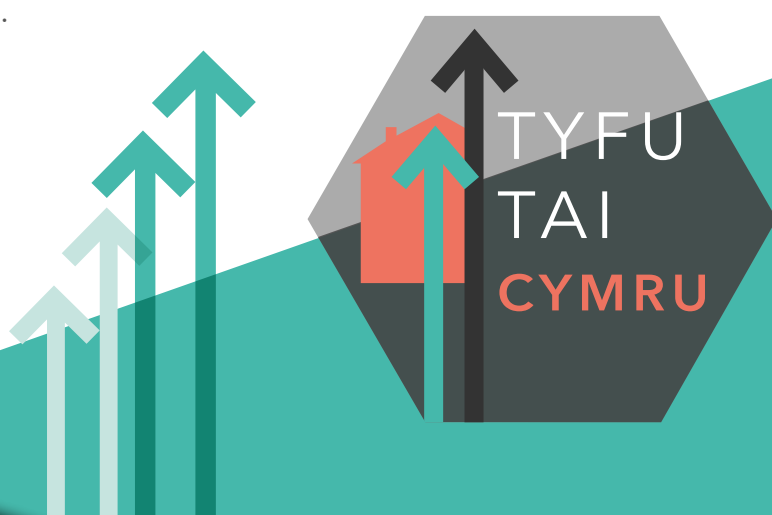
We wanted to hear from people working in housing in local authorities about their experiences, and we will use the information people share with us to inform our future research priorities and in discussions with Welsh Government and other influential groups.

We received the answers to this survey in February and March 2020, before the impact of the Coronavirus and following lockdown. Much will have changed since then but we wanted to be sure that senior staff in Local Authorities are able to reflect on what their staff told us as they plan for new priorities.

We wanted to understand how local authority housing staff view their local authority and its priorities. We were also keen to understand the pressure staff are under, what motivates them to work in housing and what would help them in their work.

CIH Cymru have been working with partners and legislators to enshrine the right of housing in legislation as set out in our joint [report](#) with Shelter Cymru and Tai Pawb. We asked the respondents to our survey if they supported this focus and over three-quarters of respondents told us they agreed with this statement. Having housing as a right would turn the debate about housing from one of need to one of dignity and equal opportunity.

We also wanted to know the extent to which housing professionals feel their local authority has a recognition of the role that housing plays in creating sustainable communities. As a project with a focus on ensuring all housing professionals are able to have their say in this area we were really interested that 68% of people thought their local authority does recognise the role of housing in building sustainable communities. This does mean that the remaining 32% do not feel housing is recognised in creating sustainable communities – a significant amount. We would encourage those in senior roles with responsibility for housing in local authorities to reflect if this could be an issue in their area.



We asked staff what they viewed as the priority of their local authority and the resounding answer was to increase the supply of affordable homes, this will not come as a surprise to people reading this report.

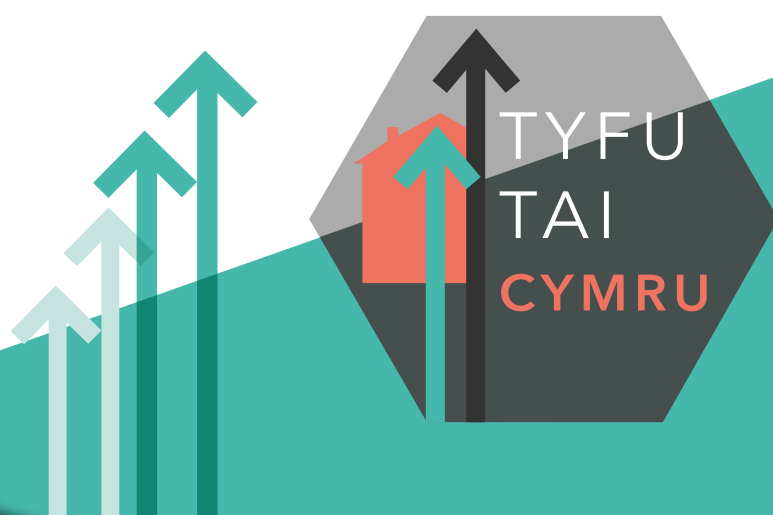
The final section of the report focuses on the pressures staff are under and what would help them. We urge council leaders and senior staff to read this report and understand the issues facing frontline staff delivering one of the key public services in Wales. As housing, along with many other services, recalibrates how it delivers safe homes to households during and beyond the Coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak, it will be crucial to consider the wellbeing of these professionals and to build on the work already being done.

What do our findings mean?

Our research has discovered that two-thirds of people working in housing in Local Authorities are motivated by “helping people”. But those same staff say they feel under pressure, stressed by their workload and in need of more staff in their departments to enable them to do their work.

Seven out of ten of our respondents think that their local authority does recognise the role that housing plays in creating sustainable communities. The priority is on increasing the amount of affordable housing available for many local authorities, and this needs to be matched by the staffing to be able to manage the housing well for all communities.

Tackling homelessness is rightfully a priority across Wales but we need to be sure that we have the infrastructure to embed ways of working that ensure all people have a right to housing. Our questions relating to respondents’ perceptions of Local Authorities capacity to overcome homelessness and to work in collaboration between departments suggest there is work to be done to improve confidence of staff in these areas.



1. Introduction

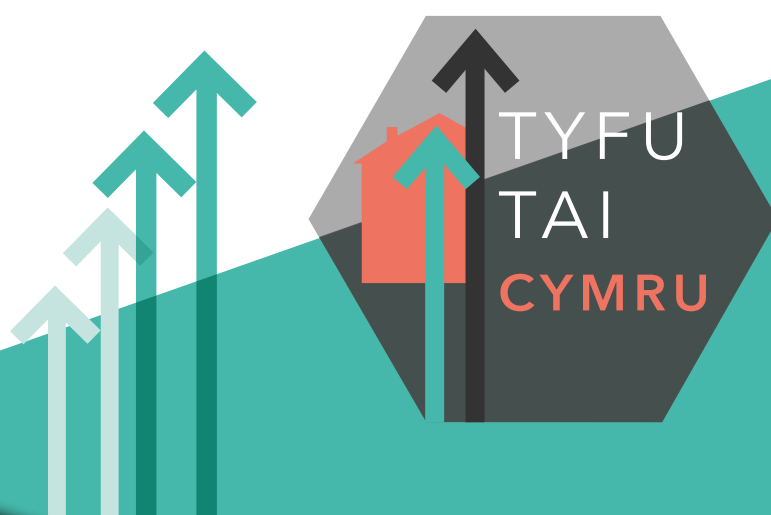
Local authority housing professionals have a wide variety of responsibilities, including helping people find a suitable home, manage community planning and provide links to essential infrastructure (including signposting to support services).

Tyfu Tai Cymru (TTC) is a 5-year policy project working through the Chartered Institute of Housing (Cymru) seeking to fill gaps in evidence and use the voices of housing professionals to support policymaking in Wales. Reflecting on one of the main aims of TTC - 'Making sure housing is always a priority of local government' this research aims to bring the voices of the housing profession in local government to the fore, highlighting the opportunities and challenges they face in the current climate.

We wrote to local authority housing professionals across Wales and received 51 responses, 39 from people working at non-stock transfer local authorities and 12 from stock-transfer. The survey was open

for approximately 4 weeks from January - February 2020. The answers were collected before the Coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak and lockdown took place. In a later section of this paper, we reflect on how the issues and opportunities highlighted in this report could be impacted by the COVID-19 outbreak.

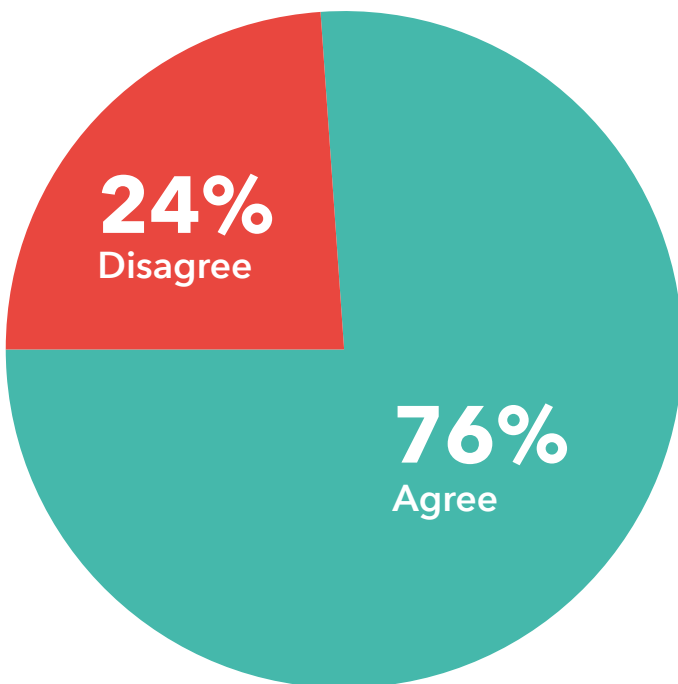
We asked local authority housing professionals a series of questions relating to their roles and challenges they faced, and their perceptions of how their own local authority is delivering on key areas such as relieving homelessness and collaboration.



1.1 Should the Right to Housing be enshrined in legislation?

CIH Cymru alongside Tai Pawb and Shelter Cymru have been working with Welsh Government to explore the opportunity to embed the Right to Housing in legislation. This would transform the discussion around housing from focusing on who is considered “deserving” of state support for a home to it being an integral right for all people with the ability to help those in need of financial or other support.

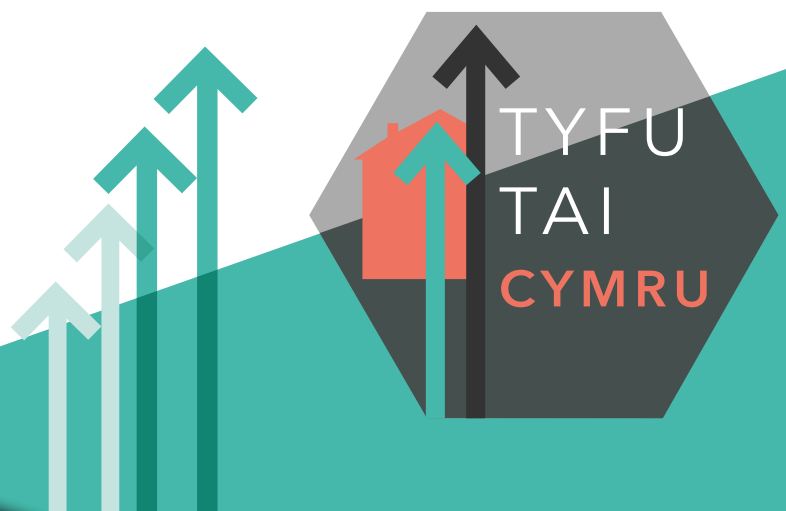
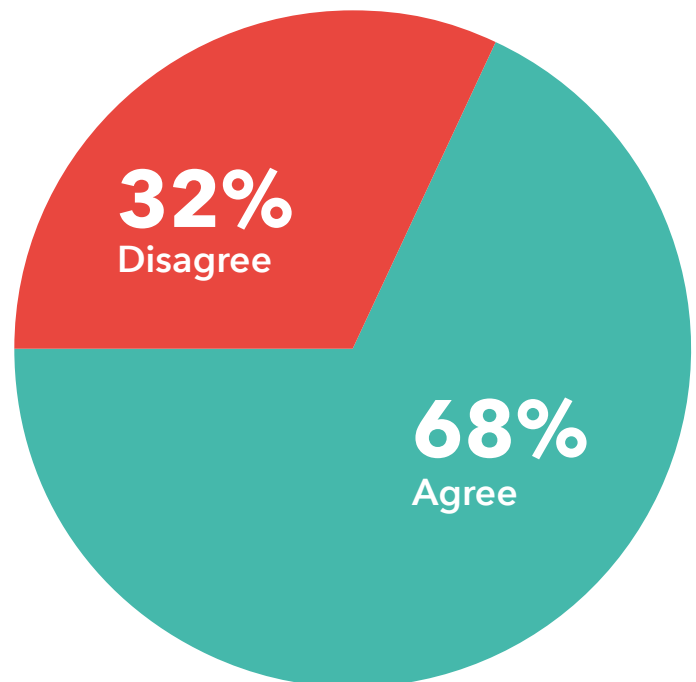
We wanted to understand the extent to which this call for change to our legislation is supported by housing professionals in local government. Over three-quarters of our respondents told us that they thought housing should be a human right in legislation.



1.2 Do you feel your local authority recognises the role housing plays in creating sustainable communities?

In recognising the role that housing plays in the lives of families and individuals in providing homes, safety and communities we wanted to understand the extent to which housing professionals feel this is recognised by their local authority. Over two-thirds of respondents felt that their local authority recognises the role of housing in creating sustainable communities.

The central role of housing in creating sustainable communities is recognised by my local authority.

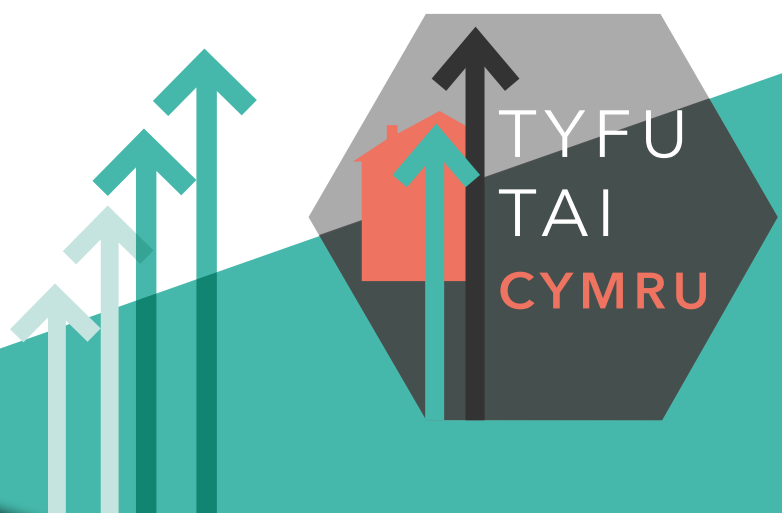
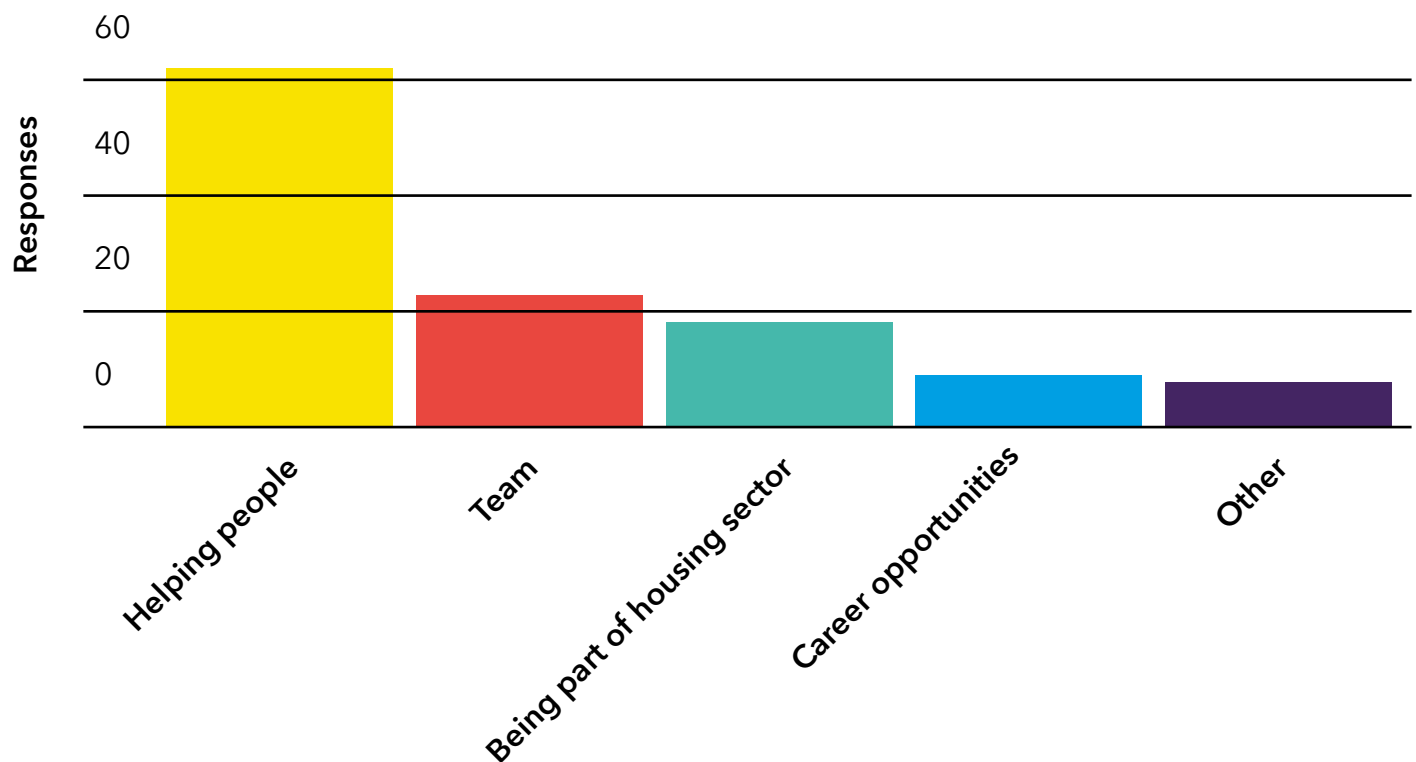


2. Housing Professionals

2a. Motivation to work in housing

As the membership body for housing professionals we are always interested to hear what it is that motivates people to come to work. It was not a surprise to us to hear that the largest response was with respect to "helping people" (over 60%). The altruistic drive is important and something to be celebrated, alongside the sense that working in housing is one of the "caring professions".

Less of a factor but still identified was the sense of "team" and "being part of the housing sector" (20%). Career opportunities were considered less important for respondents.



2b. What pressures are you under?

Heavy workload was identified three times more than any other issue with 26% of all votes, followed by budget/funding at 10%.

A heavy workload is associated with increased stress and lack of satisfaction in a role. In recent years some local authorities have merged housing departments into wider directorates alongside job losses. The combination of a decade of austerity impacting heavily on local authorities and decreased investment in housing combined with recent pressure to rapidly increase the quantity of homes is putting a lot of pressure on the shoulders of housing professionals.

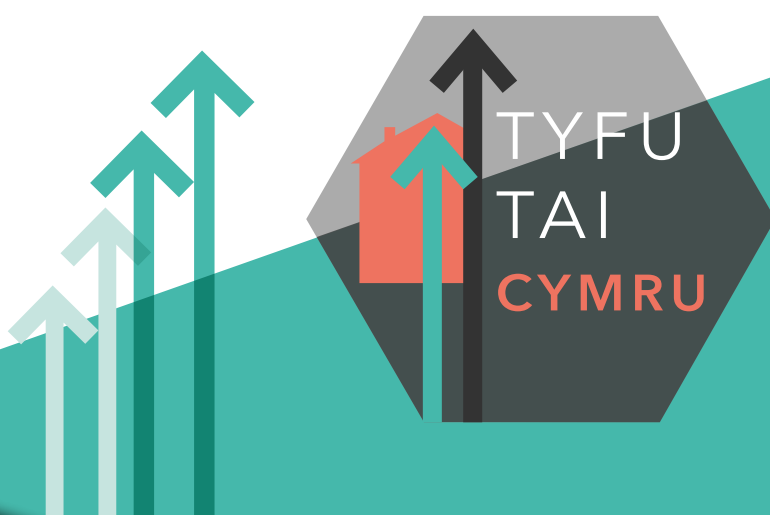
	Topic	Percent
1	Workload	26
2	Budget/funding	10
3	Lack of affordable housing (all tenures)	8
4	Waiting lists for social housing	7
5	Compliance	7
6	Engagement with tenants	6
7	Rent collection	6
8	Planning	5.5
9	Tackling homelessness	5.5
10	range of topics which received 2 votes of less	19

*"Lack of capacity to achieve objectives/
Lack of recognition and understanding
of the role/different priorities within
the sector such as affordability/public
perception/impact on local areas."*

*"To reduce arrears under difficult current
climate, continue to provide a good
service even though short staffed,
continue to work to current guidelines."*

*"Lack of capacity due to previous financial
cuts. Stress levels in the Team due to high
caseloads."*

*"Homelessness, Welfare Reform (Universal
Credit), lack of desired accommodation,
lack of affordable housing, citizens in
poverty related to Welfare Reform and
large waiting lists for Social Housing
meaning an increased reliance on
the PRS."*



2c. What do you feel would make your role easier?

Mirroring the responses above, housing professionals identified a need for more staff to help them deliver their work. This may suggest that the priority of developing more homes for local authorities set out in Section 7 of this report has not yet been matched with sufficient staff to deliver on these objectives.

Topic	Percent
More staff	23
More funding	13
Better relationships with other agencies	11
Improved SMT	8
Working better with others	9
Better infrastructure (IT, Communications functions)	11
Relationship with Welsh Government	6
range of topics which received 2 votes of less	19

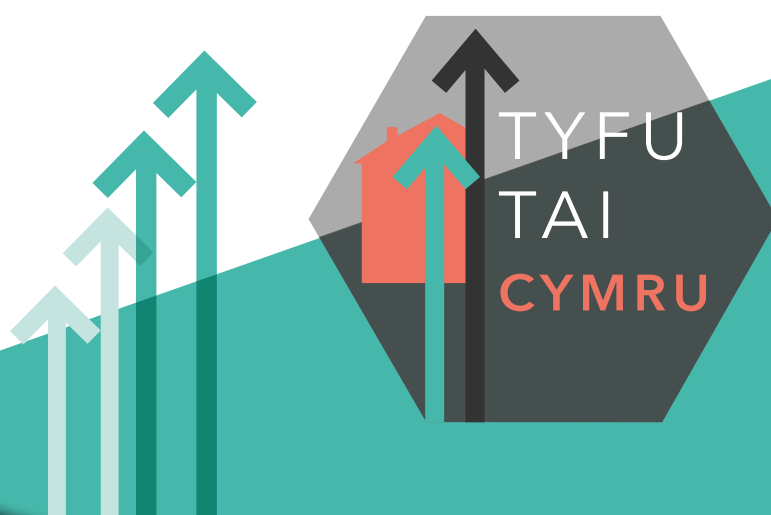
"Certainty of funding for at least 3 years (more if possible). This would allow development of initiatives, enough time to change things that are found to be less than successful and for more meaningful outcomes once the schemes/changes are embedded."

"Joint working with support agencies/ social services/mental health."

"Being able to focus more on early intervention and prevention rather than crisis management."

"A more co-ordinated approach to the Housing sector as a whole within the council."

"Being seen by Welsh Government as a stakeholder in housing issues."



2d. Perceptions of their own local authority

We know local context is important and that local authorities will need to set different priorities to match the needs in the communities which they serve.

We asked this question to understand the extent to which there is conformity across local authorities. We did not put a limit to peoples answers but most people gave 1 – 3 priorities.

Of the 95 topics mentioned, there was split into 23 categories.

The most popular category focused on local authorities increasing housing supply (including new builds). Over 25% of votes was in relation to this area.

The next priority outlined by respondents was in relation to tackling homelessness, with 14% of the overall votes.

The top 5 answers with percent of votes are set out in the table below. Respondents identified 17 other categories which received 3 or less votes. The volume of issues identified reflects the wide variety of housing, regeneration and care and support functions housing professionals working within local authorities may be involved in.

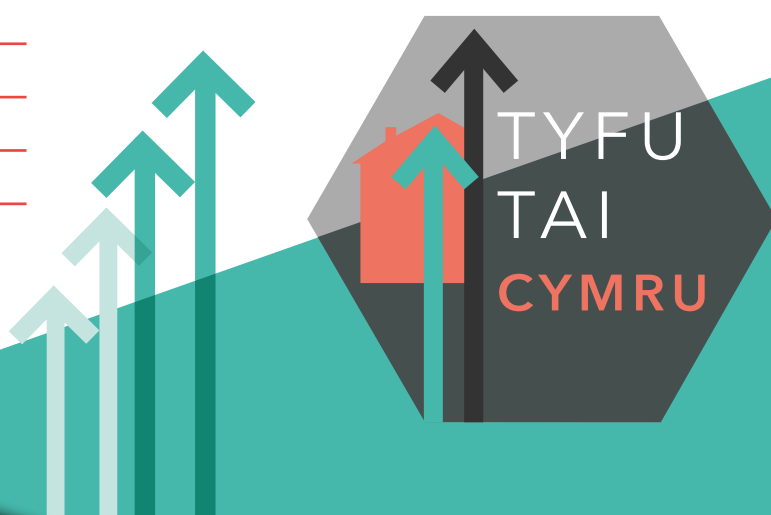
Topic	Percent
Local authorities increasing housing supply (incl new-builds)	24
Tackling homelessness and rough sleeping	14
WHQs	9
Sustain tenancies	8
Standards/repairs	7
Others	38

"Finding suitable affordable accommodation for our clients."

"Ensuring adequate supply of affordable housing and supporting vulnerable people."

"Reducing homelessness, stock regeneration, increasing buy backs/new builds."

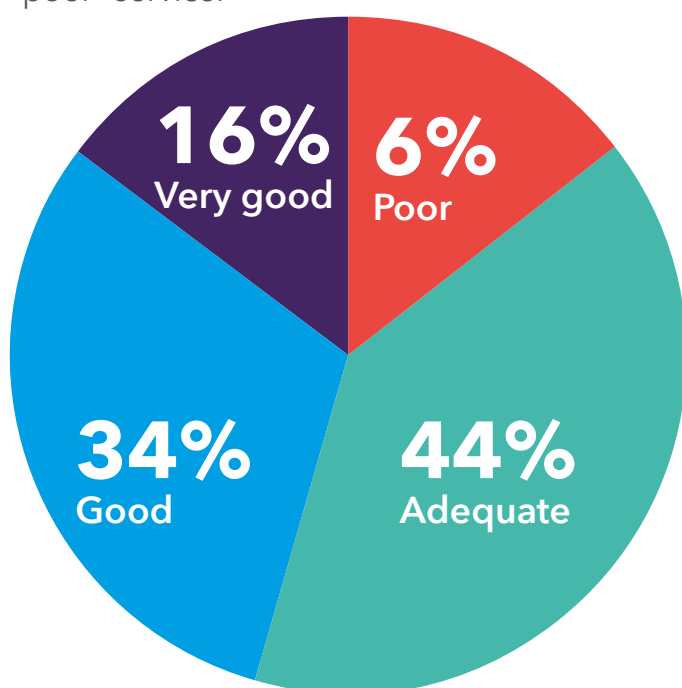
"Develop more Social Housing, ensure adequate affordable housing and reduce homelessness."



2e. What is your perception of your authority's ability to address and reduce homelessness in all its forms?

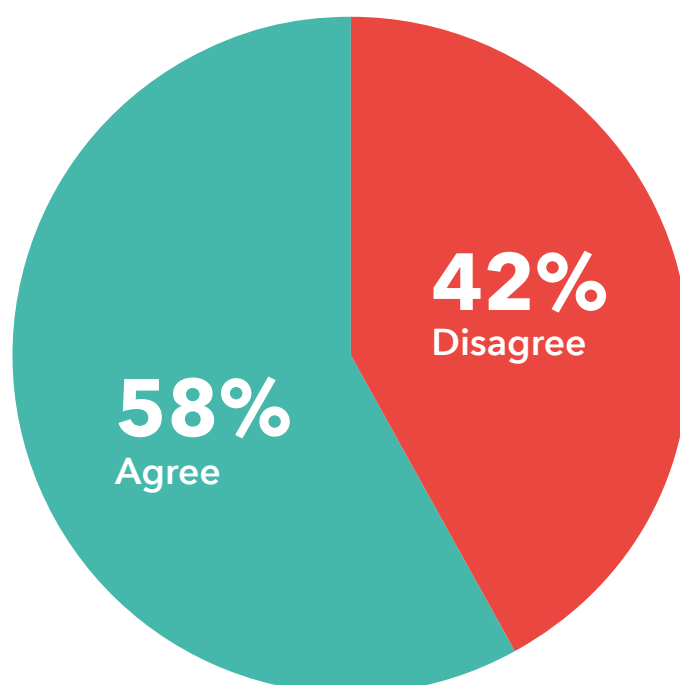
Reducing homelessness is a priority for Welsh Government with the objective to ensure all homelessness is eradicated, and where it cannot be prevented "ensure it is rare, brief and un-repeated"¹. In order to assist with this objective, we asked local authority staff about their confidence in their organisation to tackle homelessness.

Only 50% of staff thought their authority was in a "good" or "very strong" position to tackle homelessness, 44% adequate and 6% poor. The reasons for this may be multiple but this lack of confidence is important to understand – priorities must be matched with sufficient resources for staff to be able to deliver. The answers to some of our earlier questions suggest that there are concerns about staff shortages and funding. Without these, it will be harder to achieve success if the people delivering the work see only an "adequate" or "poor" service.

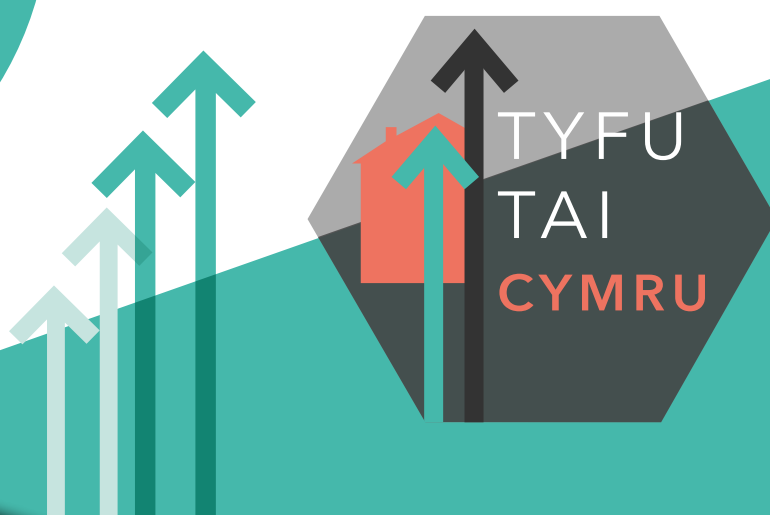


2f. We have enough collaboration within my authority to deliver more housing

Working in partnership is key to delivering services that can really make a difference to people's lives. It is a concern that 42% of respondents felt that there is not enough collaboration within their authority to deliver more housing. It is important to understand where this view has come from, and what steps need to be taken to overcome this and develop collaborative working for staff across local authorities.



¹<https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2019-10/homelessness-strategy.pdf>



3. Impact of COVID-19 and lockdown

We collected the results from this survey in February 2020 and the findings at this time were clear; the priorities for local authorities was to increase both quantity and quality of homes. Less than a month later, as the country reacted to the COVID-19 global pandemic and many building sites emptied in an attempt to ensure safe physical isolation for all staff, it is unclear how local authorities will meet their own, or Welsh Government's, aspirations.

This survey has revealed that housing professionals are predominantly driven by "helping people". This has been relevant during the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdown as housing staff were deemed "key workers" in their role keeping well and safe at home. It is important that we do not lose touch with this motivation to help others and we continue to reward staff in housing through recognition of their role.

In Wales, Julie James MS the Minister for Housing and Local Government wrote to every local authority to state that "no one should be without suitable accommodation and support during this pandemic. This includes those, who are currently sleeping rough, and those who are under threat of having to do so, for example, those who are leaving prisons or other institutions without any accommodation to go to, and those who are precariously reliant on others

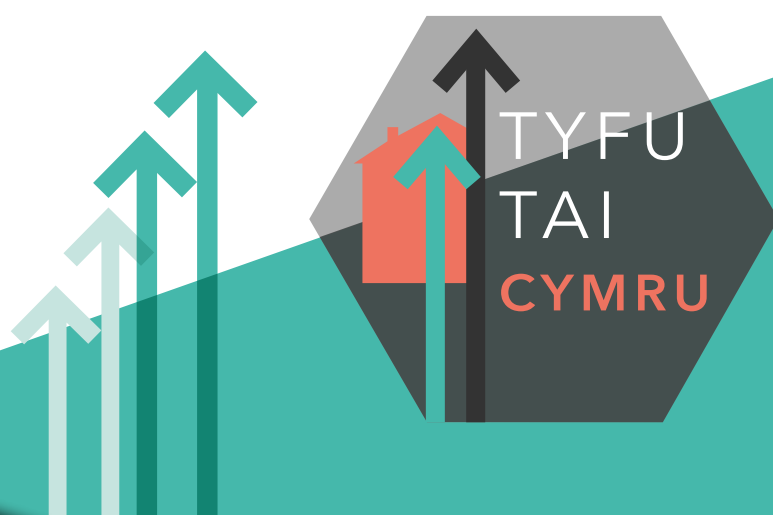
such as people sofa surfing or in unsuitable temporary accommodation²." This suggests a step-change in government policy to a stronger line on the duty of local authorities to house people, which is welcome but it is also important to recognise the difficulty in making this workable in practice, as some of our findings indicate.

The pandemic has also highlighted that we need to rethink how we provide housing in a manner that means people are able to live independently while accessing essential support services. As demonstrated in this survey housing professionals working within local authorities provide so much more than the bricks and mortar but also advice and support in uncertain times.

Future investigations will want to uncover how the pandemic was able to spread within and between households and will illustrate the differential experience of homes with spare rooms (to allow for people with symptoms to self-isolate), gardens and outdoor space.

The experience of housing professionals should be central to these investigations as people with direct knowledge of how to deliver on central and local government priorities.

²https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2020-04/guidance-for-local-authorities-in-supporting-people-sleeping-rough-COVID-19_0.pdf

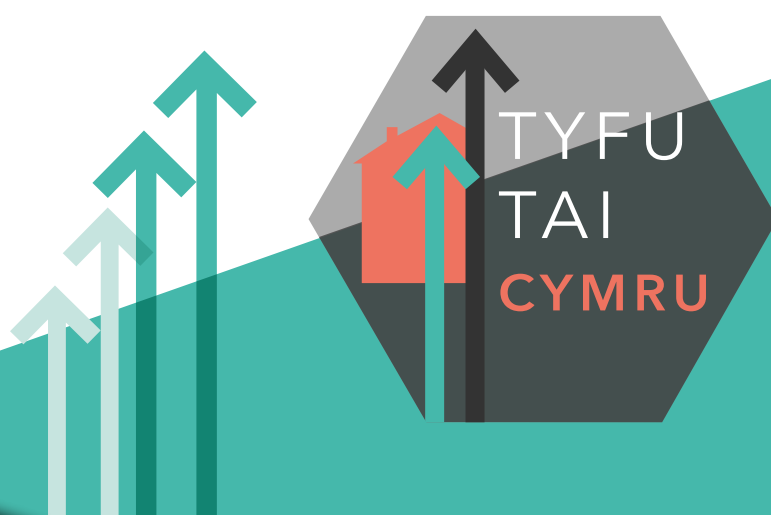


Recommendations to senior staff in local authorities

1. Ensure 'Housing' is included as a priority within corporate plans, with the details around delivery produced collaboratively with housing professionals
2. Undertake an annual wellbeing survey to track the wellbeing of staff working in housing-related roles combined with a clear action plan for addressing any areas of concern.
3. Include housing-related roles as an area of focus within workforce development plans with clear activity to raise awareness and emphasise the variety of role and the rewarding nature of the work, linking in with relevant higher-education and employment agencies.
4. Urgently address the issue of collaboration across departments. Our previous report set out the six principles for good partnership working which would provide a good basis.

Recommendations to Welsh Government

5. Recognise the desire from local authority housing professionals to incorporate a right to housing into Welsh law, committing to making this a reality.
6. Undertake urgent work to analyse the extent to which a lack of resources (like staff shortages, funding shortfalls) could undermine the ability of local authority housing professionals to prevent and alleviate homelessness within and beyond the context of the COVID-19 outbreak.
7. Review in partnership with local authorities their ability to directly deliver more affordable housing in a post-COVID-19 context, considering how expectations and targets may shift as a result.





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Tyfu Tai Cymru -
Because Housing Matters