

Sector snapshot

Survey of housing professionals in Wales

April 2022



Foreword

The results are in from our most recent survey of housing professionals across Wales. Firstly thank you to everyone who completed it - your views were insightful and important and has helped shape this report.

With the survey focusing on new ways of working following the huge upheaval over the past couple of years, as expected we've identified some clear strengths of the sector, but also some areas where we could do better.

We think its brilliant to see the vast majority of respondents are motivated to work in housing in order to make a difference. As a panel we definitely resonate with those values. Having that as a driving force behind a desire to work in housing is a strong foundation for the sector to thrive from. It is also clear from the responses that there are driven and innovative professionals in the sector with ideas on how they could improve things within their organisations. There was a common theme around how we use the Tenant Voice to help improve services, and also how we can more closely collaborate with mental health professionals to support tenants and colleagues alike. It is these colleagues across housing with that drive and those ideas that need to be provided with the right environment to deliver their best - and we are at risk of losing them.

To not lose them and help create the right environment for them to thrive, we've also identified some areas that require shifts. Sufficient resources was a common challenge raised, both in terms of meeting current demand for services and in how services could improve. A number of respondents reported that their workload seemed both relentless and unmanageable, which is unsustainable in the long-term. Communication was another concern and raised as an area that could be improved; both internally between teams working together, but also 'up the chain' from operational colleagues up to senior leadership to give an honest picture of job pressures and the daily strain on services. There are also concerns on how financial issues and the cost of living crisis will affect their work, both in the need to shift resources, and the impact this will have on tenants.

We know there are other pressures on housing organisations will currently want to focus their efforts on such as 'net zero', homelessness, building standards and safety, to name a few. But without the people within your organisation, none of these priorities can be successfully delivered. We all know the whole way we live and work has shifted massively over the past two years, and we know organisations need to alter their approach to provide a platform for our colleagues across housing to do their best work. There is a need to create the right environment and culture for motivated and skilled housing colleagues to thrive.

We as a panel think there are some key questions that leaders within housing need to consider;

- Are we designing the way we work in a way that gets the best out of our people?
- Are we delivering our 'core' services well enough?
- Are we providing the right resources to the right teams?
- Are we giving people the learning and development opportunities they need in this new environment?

We expect these conversations to have already been happening - and if they haven't then why not?

We know there will be examples of good practice to be found across Wales, and as a progressive nation that looks to help each other and collaborate, let's get sharing.

Thank you for reading and please share this report far and wide. Don't hesitate to get in touch with the panel with any feedback and ideas.

Gareth Leech

Chair - Housing Futures Cymru

Survey analysis

Our survey received 56 responses. The vast majority of the respondents work for housing associations in roles ranging from housing/tenancy support to data protection and compliance.

The following sections provide an overview of the key trends in the responses to the survey questions posed.

What motivates you to work within the housing sector and what rewards you the most with your current role?

A dominant theme in the responses saw 88 per cent of respondents indicate their desire to help people/ make a difference/have a positive impact as the driving force behind their desire to work in the housing sector. Responses reflected an understanding that respondents work in roles where they may be in a position to 'change lives' and help people at risk of or facing significant hardship.

"The opportunity to have a positive impact in people's lives, those who may have struggled with housing in the past, and being able to provide them with suitable housing and necessary support to help them maintain their tenancies"

"Fell into housing 30 years ago and have had no desire to leave the sector ever since. Job satisfaction is really important to me and pushing for service improvements in an innovative and enthusiastic keeps it very interesting. Biggest reward is meeting and exceeding customer and staff expectations".



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

This question prompted a wide array of answers, with some overarching themes emerging:

- Staff resource is a common challenge both in terms of meeting current demand for services and in how services could improve
- Communication between and within departments was frequently mentioned by respondents as an area where improvement could be achieved
- A number of respondents recognised the need to more closely link with mental health professionals both from staff well-being and tenant/community support perspectives
- A common theme was the need to tap into tenant expertise and insight - from making a greater push to directly employ tenants to making better use of surveying data to inform and refine changes to services
- The need to provide greater help to low-income households was also suggested as a key area that should receive greater focus

"Listening properly to our tenants - I think we listened previously but we are hearing what they are saying now and understanding how what we may see as small changes has a massive impact on them. Keep learning there is always something we can be doing better".

"I work in the community mainly and try to dedicate a day a week to admin duties. COVID changed the way in which we all work and due to this I occasionally feel that communication with colleagues is disjointed, and it can sometimes make training in a new role difficult and getting answers and support can take longer than if we were at the office".

"Resources needed in the supporting/health sector. Housing is already under so much pressure to provide a high level of service across the business, with cutbacks and limited capacity, this is difficult to sustain".

"Mental health tenancy support officers who can assist our residents when they go into crisis (or before they do)"

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

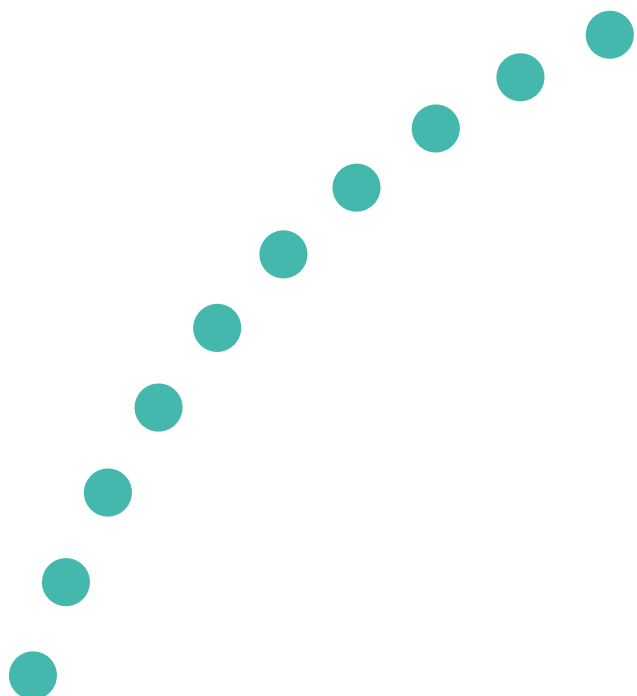
Positively, a number of respondents reported that they do feel motivated in their role, and well supported by their organisations generally, and colleagues they work with closely. There were however a number of areas where respondents felt improvements could be made to support their well-being and motivation, including:

- Exploring a shorter 4-day working week and the flexibility that would bring
- Move toward more frequent face-to-face activities in light of less/no formal COVID-19 restrictions being active at present.
- Working from home was often cited as a challenge with many finding it difficult in practice to draw a line between family and professional life, in turn finding it difficult to switch off from work. There was also a clear tension with the accessibility of staff working from home, the frequency of online meetings and the expectations around being contactable outside of usual working hours
- Greater and more frequent communication between higher level management and operational staff to better inform a view of job pressures, the breadth of roles and the daily strain on services
- Reviewing workload pressures - a number of respondents reported that their workload seemed both relentless and unmanageable, reflecting on both the scale of the customer base they support, but also the sheer volume of work.

"More time to come away from the laptop or work I'm doing, I feel I never switch off anymore and my work life balance is a struggle. I currently use my lunch break to do the school run and I feel everyday is just constantly work focused and by the time it's the weekend I'm too exhausted to do anything".

"I think sometimes the more agile way of working can be really overwhelming because you're constantly having to set barriers in your own home and it's hard to shut off - so when you've set your hours your not able to receive or do any work once you've shut off for the day/before you've started to allow that work/home switch to happen".

"Housing officers are seen as police officers, social services and maintenance surveyors . It would be nice to have the role of the housing officer defined so out limitations down get drowned out by what we cannot do".



Apart from responding to the COVID-19 pandemic, what do you feel are the key pressures or barriers for you in your job role, or things affecting your organisation? e.g. financial, tenancy management, asset management, staff/resources, being listened to by management, communication, business strategy or external demands.

- Many respondents highlighted the impact of poverty and how for many households this has worsened over the course of the pandemic, compounded further for many by mental/physical health issues
- A number of respondents highlighted the pressures on other services having a knock-on effect on their work. For example, comments often cited the example of linking with social care services where a referral could be made but the subsequent delay in action could often result in a worsening situation and poorer long-term outcomes for individuals involved
- The ongoing impact of staff absence and the challenges in recruiting new staff was a recurring issue many cited as a source of additional pressure on their own role/team
- Financial pressures faced by organisations was seen by many as damaging what services could achieve in practice. For some this had resulted in key roles involved in sustaining tenancies being withdrawn and tenant expectations not being met
- The legacy of operating under COVID-19 restrictions was also felt to be presenting different pressures. For some this had resulted in anti-social behaviour cases becoming more serious whilst others noted the impact on compliance issues and the effort to maintain and improve the quality of existing homes.

"Financial difficulties for tenants that have resulted from loss of employment or long-term health effects from COVID".

"We have seen a lot of good staff leave in the past 12 months. Morale is low and people are leaving. We need to improve conditions around working from home and mileage from home and do more to retain staff".

"External demands eg. lack of mental health support for tenants and the constant battle with social services to support vulnerable of all ages. We are trying to do our own job and the other services!"