St Martin in the Fields **Charity**

Frontline Worker Survey 2025

Executive summary and recommendations

St Martin in the Fields

Frontline Network

At St Martin-in-the-Fields Charity we are passionate about the role, value and importance of frontline workers. We work with thousands of frontline workers every year to help them offer the best support possible to people facing homelessness.

We provide training, funding and bring frontline workers together directly and through our network of partners working across the four nations. These spaces create opportunities for staff to share their insights and expertise, discuss the challenges they are facing and spread solutions.

We share experiences and insights with local and national decision makers – amplifying the voices of frontline workers and the people they support and making the case for change to policy and practice.

"We no longer prevent homelessness as there are no funds to do so, we just deal with the immediate crisis. We go round in circles. Due to budget constraints, we are under constant funding pressure to reduce costs and cut numbers. This means screening homeless people, trying to avoid them accessing temporary accommodation and also cutting staff."

West Lothian, Local Government Worker

Overview

This year's Frontline Worker Survey, completed by 1,320 staff working in homelessness and housing services across the UK, reveals a workforce with a deep sense of purpose and extensive expertise in relational support.

But these strengths are being tested. Frontline workers are under mounting pressure from rising demand for their services, challenges in recruiting and retaining staff, increasingly complex cases and a chronic shortage of suitable housing.

This report is based on the eighth annual Frontline Worker Survey organised by St Martin-in-the-Fields Charity. All respondents are frontline workers, who regularly provide direct support to people experiencing homelessness.

The survey included demographic questions, questions that asked respondents to rate their experiences or choose from set options and open text questions for written explanation and commentary. The report brings together themes from the written responses, supported by relevant statistics, to show the experiences and perspectives of frontline workers across the sector.

The recommendations in this report are grounded in their experiences. They call for urgent action on housing supply, service coordination, organisational culture and workforce support. Above all, frontline workers want their voices to be heard by senior leaders, decision makers, and policy makers.

1. More demand and not enough homes

Key Findings
Frontline workers are clear that the current housing system is not meeting the needs of people experiencing homelessness.

In the last 12 months:

- **85%** of frontline workers have seen demand for their services rise

- **80%** think the homelessness situation will get worse in the next few years, while only **8%** think it will get better

"The cost of living crisis, escalating rents and lack of social housing are reaching a fever pitch, we have never seen anything like this. It's especially bad for multiple marginalised folks and those with decreased access to funds, who are often facing discrimination from landlords, extreme poverty, abuse and violence and a huge array of other challenges on top of housing."
Manchester, Charity worker

Lack of suitable accommodation

A lack of suitable accommodation is a major barrier frontline workers face.

- **83%** say it is difficult to access housing that meets clients' needs

- **55%** report that this has become more difficult in the past year.

Workers emphasise that the problem is not simply the shortage of homes, but the lack of the right type of housing with appropriate support. For people with complex needs in particular, the system often cannot provide an appropriate match. This leaves them in unsuitable or unstable situations that block progress and increase pressure on staff.

"Very little affordable housing in the area. People often need to be in the area due to schools, work or support networks."
New Forest, Charity worker

"There just isn't enough of the right types of accommodation and support that would support people with complex needs available – there isn't even enough for people who don't have any needs. A lot of the time people cannot adhere to all the rules they are expected to abide by and the sharing of spaces. People who are economically and health disadvantaged are ghettoed together which causes further problems. This makes the work very difficult and this has an impact on your own mental wellbeing – burn out is a high risk."
Cornwall, Local Authority Employee

"It isn't enough to find housing, it needs to be the right placement, somewhere they feel safe and able to take the next steps in their life such as processing their experiences with specialist support, accessing education and employment, and being part of a community."
Manchester, Charity worker

Difficulties accessing the private rental sector

The private rented sector is both increasingly difficult to access but often the only realistic option, which is a major source of frustration.

Rising evictions and landlord behaviour in anticipation of forthcoming changes under the Renters' Rights Bill have further reduced stability and availability of options.

- **84%** of frontline workers say it is difficult to find private sector accommodation within the Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rate

- **90%** say it is difficult to find landlords willing to let to LHA claimants

- **89%** say it is difficult to secure a guarantor.

"Accessing private rented housing is becoming incredibly difficult due to supply not meeting demand or rents being above LHA and asking for guarantors most people cannot give."
Gateshead, Community Organisation

'I expect there to be a large number of evictions ahead of the upcoming Renters Rights Bill, and likely government cuts to benefits.'
Tandridge, Local Government Homelessness Team

Housing allocation and gatekeeping

Rigid housing allocation rules and gatekeeping by those in decision-making roles sometimes stops frontline staff from being able to match people with appropriate options.

"If the bureaucracy was reduced, and I could let to those who needed a home instead of those who have just put themselves on a list. A little more freedom would be useful in my role."
Wirral, Registered social landlord

Flooring, furniture and white goods

Many social housing properties are let without flooring, and both social and private rented homes often lack basic furniture and white goods.

These costs can be a major barrier to moving in, particularly for people with experience of homelessness who rarely have the resources to cover them.

- **63%** of frontline workers said it is difficult to access flooring for accommodation

- **77%** said it is difficult to find furnished homes.

"Even when offers are made for social housing, it is difficult to find support/suitable furniture/ white goods etc meaning clients are not equipped to sustain the tenancies and at high risk of homelessness once again."
Belfast, Charity worker

These issues often mean there is a long wait for settled housing and periods of instability, which in turn undermines progress towards long-term sustained housing.

Services' response to the housing situation

Some respondents indicated that their service was responding to the lack of suitable housing by increasing their own housing provision.

"We have increased the number of units contracted to manage with a view to adding more in the coming year so we can accommodate more young people and help alleviate waiting times individuals' experience from approaching the local authority to being referred in to our service and a property being available."
Sheffield, Social Landlord employee"

Recommendations

National Governments and local authorities across the UK need to...

1

Improve the availability of appropriate and affordable accommodation, and:

a. Make more self-contained and specialist and supported accommodation available that meets people's needs and reflects the level of demand.

b. Raise Local Housing Allowance so that it is aligned with actual local rent levels, enabling people experiencing or facing homelessness to access private rented housing.

c. Address barriers in the private rented sector by tackling the requirements and processes that exclude people on low incomes or supported by benefits, such as guarantor demands and affordability rules, and working with landlords to ensure fairer access to housing.

2

Guarantee the essentials people need to move in and stay housed

Housing offers can fall through or lead to repeat homelessness if people lack essentials like furniture, white goods and flooring or practical support when moving in. Housing providers should ensure accommodation is ready to move into and where needed, there is support available for clients to help them settle in and sustain their tenancy.

I just don't see it getting any better. Our emergency/temporary accommodation is full, we are placing people in B&B's, there is not enough affordable housing, no social housing, we are at saturation point."
Ceredigion, Local government employee

2. Improving collaboration between services

Key Findings
Staff consistently reported that disconnected services and lack of joint responsibility across housing, health and support are harming outcomes.

System blockages

System blockages are a constant source of frustration for frontline workers.

- **88%** of frontline workers reported that long waiting lists were always or often a barrier to helping people

- **59%** reported that requirements for documentation delayed access to getting people support

- **59%** reported digital exclusion as a barrier.

Focus on crisis, not prevention

The focus on crisis response leaves little room for prevention or sustained support. Frontline workers say high demand or system constraints often prevent them from addressing root causes or helping people build long-term stability. As a result, opportunities to prevent homelessness are often missed, leaving people at risk of repeat homelessness. Staff often know what would make a difference in the longer term, but they lack the time, resources and system flexibility to provide it.
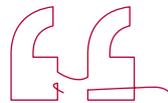
"We are having to focus on core services, which means less ability to provide longer wrap-around support and prevention work. It feels like we are churning people out and don't have time to do as much meaningful work beyond basic housing advocacy, because of the increased demand, housing crisis and funding cuts."
Manchester, Charity

Groups facing particular barriers

People experiencing or facing homelessness often fall through the gaps because no single service feels accountable.

Those with both mental health support needs and substance misuse needs were mentioned most often, with **69%** of frontline workers saying it is difficult to secure support for dual diagnosis cases. The same proportion reported challenges accessing mental health support more generally.

Lack of access to immigration advice was also a major barrier, with **57%** saying it is difficult to access.

"We see a lot of people with complex needs getting bounced between different services who all feel they don't have enough expertise in one area or other. There is a lack of intersectionality and joined-up support that means the people who are most vulnerable and in need of support end up falling through the gaps."
Manchester, Charity worker

"Only one trust area in NI currently offering dual diagnosis services – other areas demand clients be substance free in order to access Mental Health support."
Atrim and Newtonabbey, Social Landlord employee

Homelessness expertise undervalued in other sectors

Homelessness sector expertise is often undervalued in health, care and benefits systems, leaving frontline knowledge under-used in efforts to improve access and support from other services.

This lack of understanding can lead to gaps in support and missed opportunities for prevention.

"I think that there could be some more training to the mainstream workforce in relation to those who are but also those who have previously experienced homelessness, and the long-term effects on frailty, the challenge with poor help -seeking behaviour and neglect and the valuable role of care navigators to support the patients to attend for assessment/treatment - relational care."
Westminster, Health Organisation employee
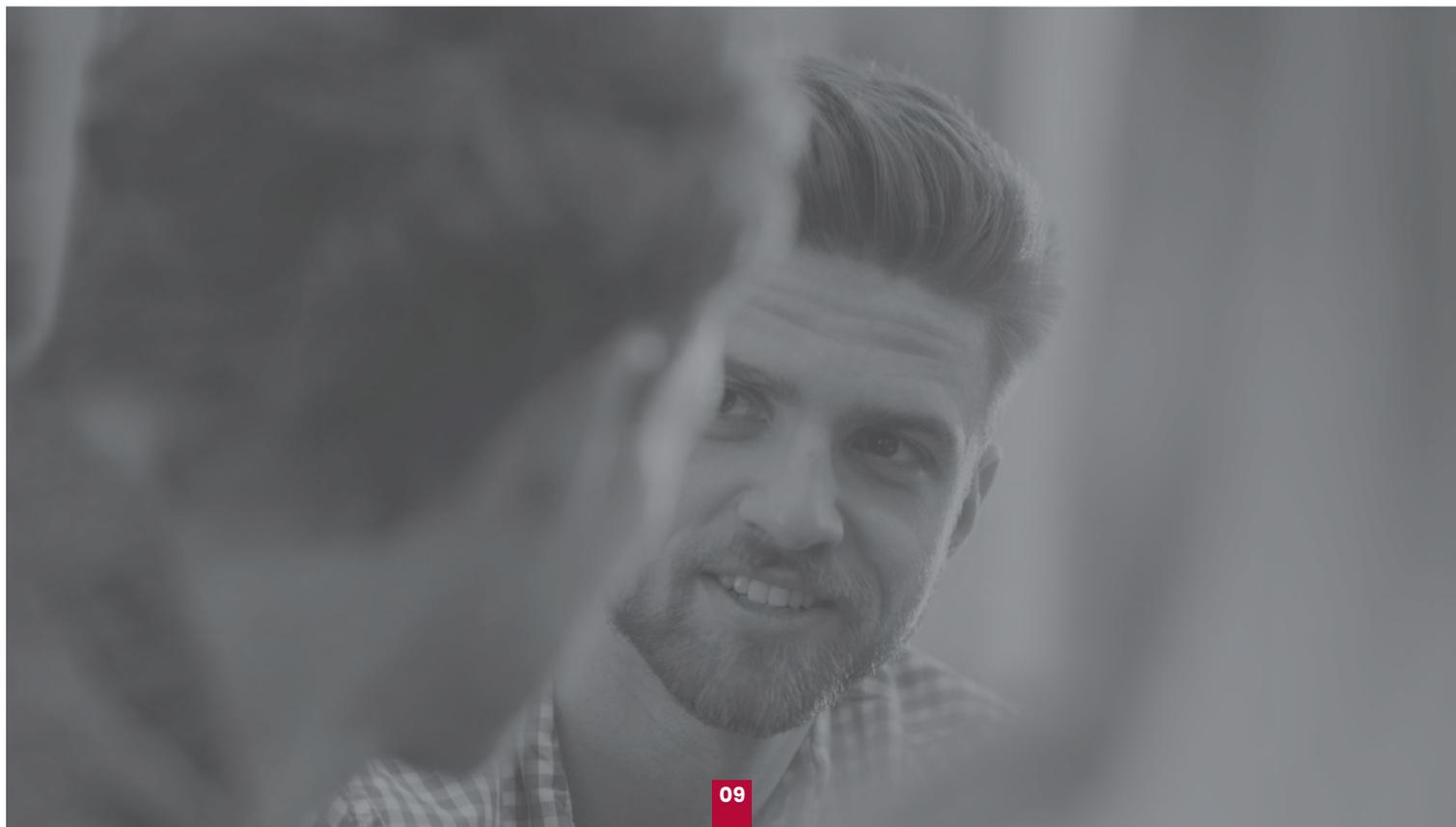
Responding to challenges

Some organisations are developing and testing new ideas in response to the challenges in the homelessness sector.

There were examples of expanding emergency accommodation, developing multi service hubs and new roles bridging the gap with services outside of homelessness.

There were also examples of organisations focusing more on collaboration at a local level to avoid duplication and improve referrals.

"We also strive to make changes based on client feedback and have a lived experience team embedded in our trust, where service users help us improve delivery of service. As an NHS trust we have to respond to demand."
Newcastle-upon-Tyne, Charity worker

"We are constantly assessing and tweaking services to try to meet demand. We have created a partnership with Shelter where they come & provide housing rights workshops with us on a monthly basis. We have been working to develop volunteers to assist with some support issues."
Tower Hamlets, Charity worker

Recommendations

3 Commissioners and services providers need to **reduce the administrative burden** by ensuring application, referral and reporting processes are proportionate and accessible to enable frontline staff, to prioritise direct relational support rather than be caught up in excessive bureaucracy.

4 National and local governments and commissioners need to **provide long-term, sustainable funding** that enables services to plan, retain skilled staff and focus on prevention, rather than being driven by short-term crisis response.

5 Commissioners and service providers need to **improve coordination between housing, health and support services** so that people with multiple needs do not fall through gaps created by fragmented systems.
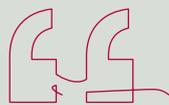
"Partner agencies, such as social services, mental health or police, do not necessarily take appropriate action to offer appropriate support to clients. Very often the case will be closed and we in housing are left to pick up the pieces even though we are not the most appropriate agency to be managing this risk and support need."
Maidstone, Local government employee

3. The experience of frontline workers

Key Findings

The survey showed that those working in the homelessness sector find their work deeply meaningful but highly exhausting. It isn't enough to rely on goodwill and staff clearly feel undervalued, putting many at risk of burnout or of leaving the sector completely. Most respondents to our survey work in large organisations of over one hundred staff. They often felt disconnected and undervalued by senior leaders. Key issues include:

Wellbeing

A very strong sense of purpose and organisational reliance on frontline goodwill masks deep feelings of emotional strain, unsustainable workloads and burnout.

- **91%** of frontline workers said their work makes a difference to the people they support, but this sense of purpose is not enough to offset the pressure

- **57%** say they are at risk of burnout

- Only **43%** feel they have enough time to do their job.

Many said they love the work but are at the same time struggling with the negative impact on their wellbeing and the difficulty of switching off.

- **51%** said their job had a negative impact on their wellbeing

- Only **36%** said the impact was positive.

Staff often experience moral injury because their options are increasingly limited.

They are committed to helping people, but are frequently unable to offer the support they believe is needed. This gap between values and reality leaves many feeling powerless and distressed.

Staff safety is a core concern for many frontline workers and closely linked to wellbeing.

- **68%** said they feel healthy and safe to do their job, but those who feel unsafe at work, especially in isolated or emotionally challenging situations, were much more likely to report a negative impact on their wellbeing.

"I enjoy my job and I care about people, so my role gives me satisfaction."
Caerphilly, Charity worker

"It is a constant conflict between experiencing vicarious trauma and remembering you are there to help. It is humbling but also can be crushing. It's good for my wellbeing in that I am able to look at good outcomes and be proud that I was able to help, however it's a struggle when I am unable to provide any assistance. It's a bit of a rollercoaster. It gets easier with time I think."
South Ayrshire, Charity worker

"Moral injury and the accumulative weight of constantly fighting to open doors for clients with limited success has a big impact on staff in this sector. There is always a risk of burn out and compassion fatigue"
Leeds, Charity worker

"I feel burnt out and underappreciated by this sector and not valued in this work, I have put a lot of time and energy and exhausted myself emotionally and physically at times from this job, it can feel very deflating."
Brighton and Hove, Registered Social Landlord

Support

Support from teams, peers and line managers is often strong.

- **87%** of frontline workers said they feel supported by colleagues

- **76%** feel supported by their managers.

"My experience with our organisation has been positive and I always feel supported and well equipped to carry out my assertive outreach role."
Cardiff, Charity worker

Feeling undervalued

However, many frontline workers feel undervalued by those in more senior or external roles.

Some say they feel unheard, invisible or disconnected from senior leadership and their expertise is not always recognised by external professionals.

- Only **60%** feel valued by their employer

- Just **54%** feel valued by health, social care and other professionals they work alongside.

"Lack of appreciation and acknowledgement of skills and experience as well as consideration of my own worries about being job-less makes the role very difficult sometimes."
Torbay, Health/Outreach

Pay

Frontline workers are taking on additional jobs and overtime just to make ends meet.

- **36%** said they need to take on extra work to cover their living costs.

- Only **34%** agree that their pay adequately covers their living costs

- Just **27%** feel they are paid appropriately, considering their responsibilities.
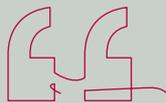
"I take up an extra 30 hours on average a month as a bank member in another organisation in order to help make ends meet with the cost of living and my job being just above minimum wage."
Newcastle, Social landlord employee

Being committed

The majority of frontline workers remain committed to working in the homelessness sector, however optimism about the future was low, reflecting deep concerns about job insecurity, low pay and the increasing pressures of their roles.

- **69%** of frontline workers say they are likely to stay in the sector

- Only **27%** feel hopeful about the future of their job.

"I would love there to be more recognition for those working in the homelessness sector. It is an often underpaid, undervalued role which is so important and such a caring and skilled role. Looking after workers can be forgotten but is essential when working with vulnerable and traumatised people. More reflective practice and more care for workers is needed. Better training is needed.
London, Health worker

Professional development

Most frontline workers feel confident in their abilities, with **88%** saying they have the knowledge and skills needed to carry out their roles, and **77%** reporting suitable access to training and professional development.

However, many still feel stuck in roles with limited opportunities for progression. Long-serving staff, in particular, say their experience is often undervalued.
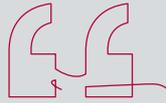
"[Name of organisation] does support a lot with wellbeing, physical and mental wellbeing. I had support from our mental health practitioner in the past and this had a positive impact in how I do my job in a more effective way."
Social Landlord employee

"I may need to look at career progression in response to the increased cost of living. There isn't much in this sector to do this. All of the mental health provision is piece meal and managed by mainstream services. If that changed with a more clear management structure within the street based teams I would stay, but I can't see that happening."
Leeds, Health worker

Recommendations

6 Governments in each of the nations of the UK should **introduce a national pay and progression framework** to ensure fair pay, job security and recognition of the skilled work undertaken, with the Real Living Wage as a minimum benchmark.

7 Governments working with the homelessness sector should **develop clear training, accreditation and career pathways** through a national qualifications framework that supports staff progression and establishes homelessness work as a recognised profession.

8 Commissioners and providers should **guarantee manageable caseloads and minimum standards for wellbeing and safety for frontline workers**, including protected time for reflective practice and access to appropriate trauma support, so that frontline staff are equipped to carry out their roles safely and sustainably.
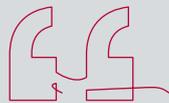
> **"I would love there to be more recognition for those working in the homeless sector and the impact this can have on workers over time. It is an often underpaid, undervalued role which is so important and such a caring and skilled role. Looking after workers can often be forgotten but is essential when working with vulnerable and traumatised homeless people. More reflective practice is needed, more care of workers following incidents is needed. Better training and equipment of workers is needed."**
> Hammersmith & Fulham, Health organisation employee

Survey respondents

Where they are based

Northern Ireland:

7%

Scotland:

8%

Wales:

17%

England:

69%

Length of Service	% of Respondents
Up to 6 months	3%
7 to 11 months	4%
1 to 3 years	24%
4 to 6 years	20%
7 to 9 years	11%
10 years or more	38%

Organisation Type	% of Respondents
Charity	48%
Registered Social Landlord	20%
Local Government	19%
Health	10%
Community Organisation	2%
Other	2%

Organisation Size	% of Respondents
Large (over 100 staff)	67%
Medium (30-100 staff)	19%
Small (under 30 staff)	15%

Job type

33% are general support workers — 33%

13% in outreach or floating support — 13%

20% in accommodation related roles — 20%

Level

73% frontline staff, with no line management responsibilities — 73%
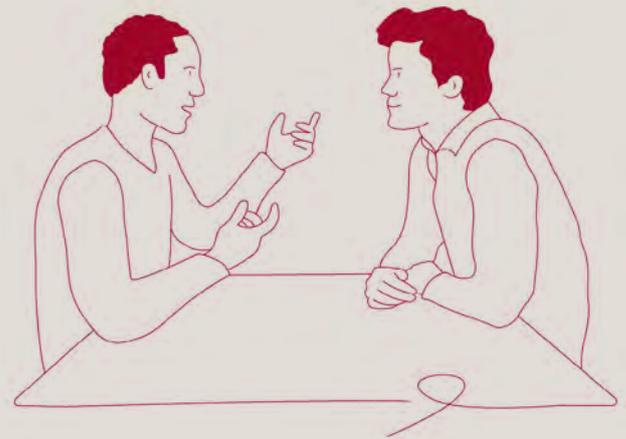
5% senior leaders — 5%

22% team leaders — 22%

Lived experience

26% have experience of homelessness — 26%

Age

| 18–24 | 3% | 25–34 | 18% |
| 35–44 | 21% | 45–54 | 28% |
| 55–64 | 26% | 65+ | 4% |

St Martin-in-the-Fields Charity is a homelessness charity that works UK-wide and year-round. Our vision is for everyone to have a safe place to call home and the support they need to keep it. Our work extends across all four nations – at the individual, community, regional, and national levels.

To achieve our vision we work in three linked areas: We help individuals directly into new accommodation through the provision of grants.

We support and champion frontline workers and capture and share learning based on their insight and experiences.

And we test, develop and share solutions to key issues and build support for them with the public and policy makers.
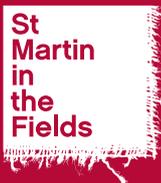
Charity

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