

Annual Frontline Worker Survey 2020

Executive Summary

Our fourth annual UK-wide survey of frontline workers supporting people experiencing homelessness.



Introduction

This executive summary of the Frontline Worker Survey provides a snapshot into staff experiences on the frontline. We define a 'frontline worker' as a paid worker who directly supports people who are experiencing homelessness. This includes staff working in the public, statutory and voluntary sectors in roles such as outreach, housing, social work, and probation.

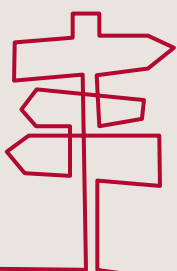
In total 930 frontline workers responded to this survey during November 2020. Further information about our findings, the survey methodology and the frontline workers who participated can be found in the full version of this report, available on our website: www.frontlinenetwork.org.uk



Key Findings

In previous years' surveys, frontline workers have highlighted systemic and practical barriers to preventing and relieving homelessness. The results from this year are marked with the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has heightened and reshaped need, as well as necessitated new partnerships and ways of working. Underlying this however, we see that many pre-existing challenges relating to access to accommodation, welfare, support services and frontline worker wellbeing remain.

Please find our headline findings on the following pages.



COVID-19 Response

Frontline workers shared mixed views on the response to the COVID-19 pandemic across the four nations. Overall, whilst the progress made was recognised, there was considerable concern about the future:



of frontline workers felt that commitment from their nation's Government to preventing and relieving homelessness **had increased** since the COVID-19 pandemic.

However, looking forward,

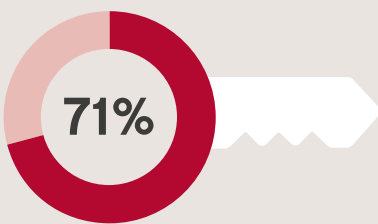
only 6% of frontline workers

felt extremely or very confident in their Government's response to homelessness prevention and relief.



Access to Accommodation

Despite emergency COVID-19 measures, lack of affordable and suitable accommodation remains a fundamental issue when preventing and relieving homelessness:



of frontline workers in the UK have found it difficult to access accommodation for the people they support since the COVID-19 pandemic started.

Frontline workers have found specialist accommodation and private rented accommodation the **hardest to access since the COVID-19 pandemic started:**

84%  of workers found specialist accommodation difficult to obtain.

82%  of workers found private rented accommodation difficult to obtain.



More [people sleeping rough] have been able to access accommodation than previously, [but] those not rough sleeping at the beginning of the pandemic often had problems accessing accommodation.

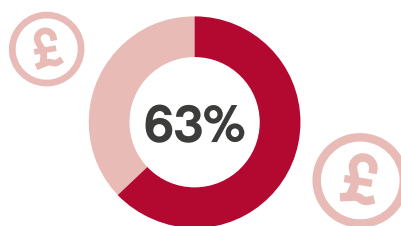


Access to Welfare Support

The economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has led to an increased need for welfare support, however frontline workers reported continued challenges in accessing Universal Credit and benefits:



of frontline workers have **seen an increase** in the number of people they support being affected by the Benefit Cap since the COVID-19 pandemic started.



of frontline workers have **found it harder** to access support for benefits issues for people they work with since the COVID-19 pandemic started.

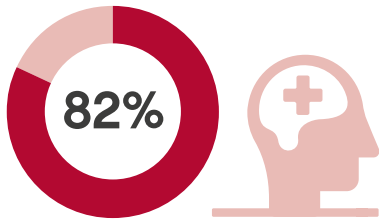


Though there is certain provision for vulnerable people I am experiencing people who are falling through cracks because up until the Covid crisis they have not had any experience of benefits and/or homelessness.

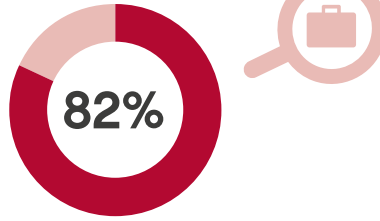


Access to Support Services and Healthcare

Many support and healthcare services shifted rapidly to remote working as a result of COVID-19. This transition has brought challenges to delivering and accessing specialist support at a time of increased need:



of frontline workers have **found it harder** to access support for mental health issues for people they work with since the COVID-19 pandemic started.



of frontline workers have **found it harder** to access employment, training and education support for people they work with since the COVID-19 pandemic started.

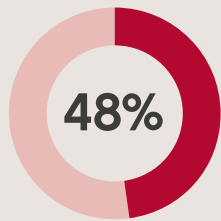


I was seeing clients throughout but all specialist services were phone only which really did/does not work for my [clients]. My team became clients' only contact and therefore taking roles much beyond our usual specialities.

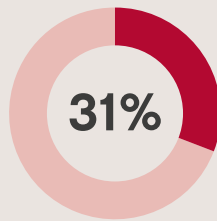


Migrant Homelessness Support

Despite progress under Everyone In¹, migrants continue to face additional risks and challenges when it comes to homelessness:



of frontline workers were supporting someone who has experienced homelessness because of their immigration status.



of frontline workers felt it had **become harder** to support migrants experiencing homelessness since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic.



Frontline Worker Wellbeing

The wellbeing of frontline workers remains a significant concern and COVID-19 has brought additional challenges relating to staff safety and remote working:



of frontline workers felt their wellbeing was negatively impacted by their role as a frontline worker.



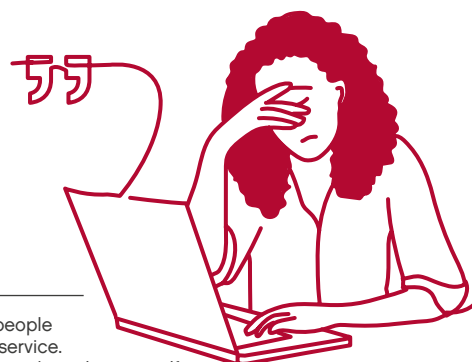
of frontline workers agreed they felt healthy and safe to perform their role.



of frontline workers felt they did not have enough time to do their job effectively.



Working from home, isolation, IT issues and massively increased [need] are affecting many staff.



1. Everyone In: A government response to the COVID-19 crisis, launched in March 2020 and aiming to provide people sleeping rough and staying in hostels and night shelters with safe accommodation: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/928780/Letter_from_Minister_Hall_to_Local_Authorities.pdf

Recommendations

Over the last year frontline workers have faced new and continued challenges when working with people to prevent and relieve homelessness. The COVID-19 pandemic has necessitated different ways of working, but also shown with significant attention and resourcing, real and positive change can happen. With renewed focus and collective action, there is now an opportunity to overcome systemic and practical barriers for good.

Based on the feedback shared by 930 frontline workers in this survey, we set out the following key recommendations.



1. Renew and Adapt COVID-19 Responses

Action must be taken to ensure that support to people experiencing homelessness meets the developing post-lockdown environment:

Governments across the UK – Acknowledge that some momentum in focus and resources for tackling homelessness has been lost since the first wave of the pandemic, and act to reverse this.

Local Authorities / Support Organisations – Consult and publish post-pandemic service plans which are informed by frontline worker experiences to ensure support can be maximised in the changing environment.

Frontline Workers – Feedback the evolving frontline experience to colleagues and the Frontline Network as services adjust post-lockdown.



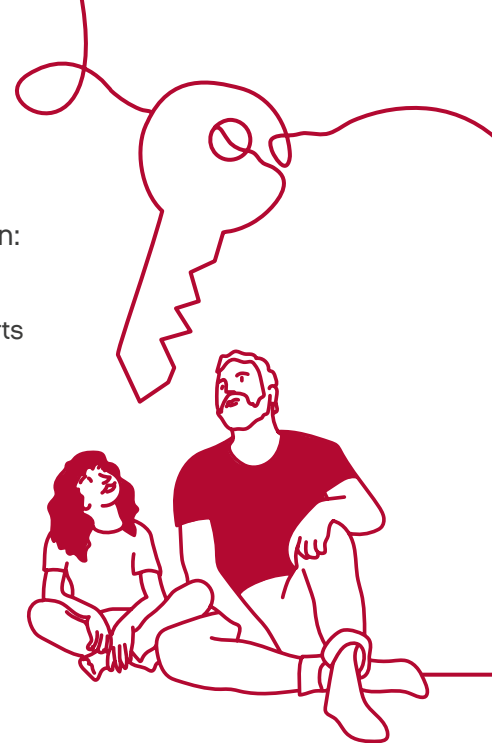
2. Improve Access to Accommodation

Further action must be taken to improve access to accommodation, particularly specialist accommodation and private rented accommodation:

Governments across the UK – Increase and sustain Local Housing Allowance rates to ensure that housing benefit or Universal Credit housing payment supports more people to access accommodation.

Department for Work & Pensions / Local Authorities / Landlords – Ensure that renters reliant on Housing Benefit or Universal Credit housing payments are not disadvantaged, or discriminated against, in accessing and keeping safe, affordable and suitable accommodation.

Local Authorities – Where there is outstanding need, develop Local Welfare Funds to cover furniture and essential household items to support people to move into homes rather than simply accommodation.



3. Increase Availability of Welfare Support

Interventions should be made to recognise financial hardship which has been worsened by the economic impact of COVID-19:

Governments across the UK – Provide a 12-month protection period from the Benefit Cap to enable households time to access support and recover.

Department for Work and Pensions – Build on existing good practice examples of Partnerships Managers working with local support services and frontline staff to address how best to meet the needs of people experiencing homelessness within the Jobcentre Plus service.

Local Authorities / Support Organisations – Greater partnership working between statutory services and frontline staff working with people experiencing homelessness, with clear and frequent communication between named contacts to help overcome barriers to supporting people receiving Universal Credit.

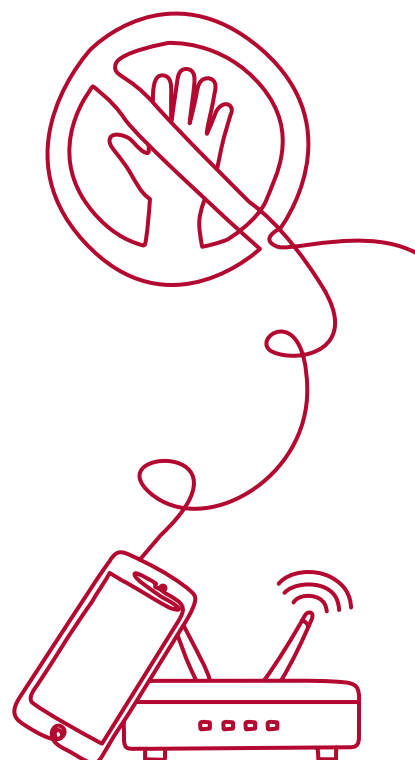
4. Address Barriers to Accessing Support Services

The COVID-19 pandemic has heightened barriers people experiencing homelessness face when engaging with support and this must be addressed:

Governments across the UK – Greater consideration needs to be given to non-digital access for statutory services as the current situation often results in those most needing assistance being the least able to access it.

Local Authorities / Support Organisations – Greater capacity is needed within services to avoid long waiting times for people experiencing homelessness. The priority area identified concerned difficulties in accessing mental health services.

Local Authorities / Support Organisations – Where services are operating remotely, individuals should be supported to access phones, computers and Wi-Fi and to develop the skills to use these effectively and overcome other potential barriers such as language and accessibility. However, where possible, services should also provide safe opportunities for face to face meetings as these are preferred by many people. Continued partnership working is essential to improve the quality of support, particularly where some services are operating remotely.





5. Ensure Migrants Experiencing Homelessness Can Access Suitable Support

People who have migrated face an increased risk of homelessness. Further action must be taken to ensure that the right support is in place and accessible to these individuals:

Governments across the UK – Homelessness reduction strategies should be reviewed to ensure that the needs of migrants experiencing homelessness are met, continuing the more inclusive and timely approach taken during Everyone In.

Local Authorities / Support Organisations – Services should take action to address the additional challenges migrants experiencing homelessness may face (for example language barriers and difficulties obtaining identification).

Frontline Workers – Staff can be part of the solution by informing the Frontline Network of any training needs and emerging best practice relating to work in this area. They can also engage in activities being run by the Pan-London Migrant Frontline Network.

6. Create Safe and Supportive Working Environments for Frontline Workers

The pandemic has necessitated changes in working environments for frontline staff. The appropriate safety and support measures must be put in place:

Governments across the UK – Frontline workers supporting people experiencing homelessness need to continue to be considered alongside other ‘care workers’ as recognised by the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation.

Local Authorities / Support Organisations – For staff undertaking face to face work, it is essential that the appropriate actions are taken to minimise the risks associated with COVID-19 so frontline workers are healthy and safe to perform their roles.

Local Authorities / Support Organisations – Where frontline staff have partially or fully shifted to working remotely, it is crucial that remote working policies are in place, designed with input from staff. These policies should respond to practical issues (such as the need for IT equipment) and wellbeing concerns (for example social isolation).



7. Value Frontline Workers

The achievements of frontline workers, particularly in adapting their support and continuing to deliver key services throughout the pandemic, should be recognised:

Governments across the UK – Frontline staff need to be recognised as key workers in a vocational profession and their input to policy development should be a standard contribution.

Local Authorities / Support Organisations – Managers should trust frontline staff members’ expertise and take time to understand and help mitigate the risks and challenges frontline staff face on a day-to-day basis (including managing their high caseloads).

Local Authorities / Support Organisations – Frontline workers’ work can also be valued through job security, which was a widely reported issue, as well as other benefits such as increased pay (following Living Wage Campaign² recommendations as a minimum), annual leave and flexible working.

2. The real Living Wage is a UK rate calculated by the Living Wage Foundation: <https://www.livingwage.org.uk>

Call for Action

To take these recommendations forward we invite decision makers from across the UK to:

1. Meet with frontline workers and members of the Frontline Network to discuss the issues raised in this report.
2. Agree a roadmap to put the recommendations of frontline workers into practice.

The decision makers we are particularly keen to engage with are:

- Governments across the UK
- Landlords (Private and Social)
- Department for Work & Pensions
- Support Organisations
- Local Authorities

We at the Frontline Network can facilitate these introductions:

If you are a decision maker please get in contact via email and we can connect you to a network of frontline workers with expertise and insight: frontline@stmartinscharity.org.uk

- If you are a frontline worker in the sector, we encourage you to **join the Frontline Network via our website** – registration is free. The network aims to amplify frontline worker voices and as a member you can also access funding, community and resources.

Addressing the issues raised in this report requires a united effort and we appreciate your support in spreading the word. Use or adapt our **template letter and tweet to share this report** with your colleagues in the sector and the politicians working to represent you.



About the Frontline Network

We believe many practical solutions – and systemic barriers – to preventing and relieving homelessness can be identified and overcome on the frontline. That is why in 2016 St Martin-in-the-Fields Charity set up the Frontline Network.

We support workers from the public, statutory and voluntary sectors working on the frontline with people experiencing homelessness. It's not about us. It's about you. We work with your ideas and expertise, finding ways to help you and your work. As part of that, we offer funding, community and resources. Our work aims to build relationships, share best practice, develop solutions, and communicate the experience and views of frontline workers.

For more information visit our website: www.frontlinenetwork.org.uk



Frontline Network

St Martin-in-the-Fields Charity
5 St Martin's Place,
Trafalgar Square WC2N 4JJ

Registered Charity No. 1156305/261359