St Martin in the Fields Charity

2026

FRONTLINE WORKER SURVEY

Executive summary and recommendations





St Martin in the Fields Frontline Network



The 2026 Frontline Worker Survey heard from 1,229 frontline workers, across the homelessness sector in the UK, who told us about their work supporting people experiencing or at risk of homelessness and about their experiences working on the frontline. The survey respondents reflect the experiences of over 20,000 people experiencing homelessness.

KEY FINDINGS

Frontline workers often know what needs to happen next to support people away from homelessness, but too often they do not have the options or resources to make it happen. Repeatedly being unable to act affects their own wellbeing.

HOMELESSNESS

85% **More than four in five** frontline workers reported challenges accessing suitable accommodation for the people they support.

52% **More than half** said accessing suitable accommodation had become harder over the previous 12 months.

86% **Almost nine in ten** respondents said finding accommodation within the Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rate was difficult or very difficult.

71% **of respondents** reported that it is difficult to access mental health care for the people they support, with **55%** finding it difficult to access specialist healthcare, immigration advice/support (**58%** of frontline workers) and legal advice (**52%**).

76% **Just over three quarters** of frontline workers thought that the homelessness situation was going to get slightly or a lot worse in the next few years.

WORKFORCE

88% felt supported by colleagues and **79%** by their manager and a large majority (**93%**) of survey respondents agreed that they had had the necessary core training.

84% reporting that they felt proud telling people what they do and **93%** saying they felt they make a difference.

51% **More than half** of the respondents said their role had an overall negative impact on their wellbeing, while over a quarter (**29%**) said they felt at risk of burnout often or always.

47% **Nearly half** said their pay is unfair and does not cover their housing and living costs.

36% of respondents feel they do not have enough time to do their jobs. Higher demand together with more challenging cases meant many felt their workload was unmanageable.

WHAT FRONTLINE WORKERS TOLD US

1. **Housing shortages and unaffordability are creating gridlock.** There is not enough accommodation that is suitable for people's circumstances and needs. Even where accommodation exists, it may be unaffordable or inaccessible because of Local Housing Allowance rates and access barriers. People who cannot move on when they need to remain in emergency, temporary or supported accommodation, reducing the options available for others.

'We are seeing more homeless/at-risk-of-homelessness families who have been evicted through no fault of their own. They are not able to find another property due to high rents, low LHA rates and no guarantor... The number in this situation is increasing, and all we can offer is support and a sticking plaster if we are lucky.'

Southend-on-Sea, Housing Association/Registered Social Landlord

2. **Difficulty accessing specialist services leaves homelessness workers supporting people while they wait.** Long waiting lists and restrictions on access to mental health, substance use, social care, legal and immigration support can increase risks to housing stability. Frontline workers can identify the need for specialist help and identify local service providers, but they cannot substitute for qualified clinical, legal or regulated professional support.

3. **Better practice cannot overcome a lack of options.** Respondents described improvements in prevention, including identifying risks earlier, tenancy sustainment, trauma-informed support, partnership working and better coordination between services. These approaches can make a real difference, but they cannot overcome a lack of suitable and affordable housing or specialist support.

4. **Frontline homelessness work requires expertise and judgement.** Workers build detailed knowledge of individuals, local systems, services and routes through homelessness through experience, training, reflection, teams and professional networks. Their expertise helps them assess risks, navigate services, advocate for people and decide what is realistic when the ideal option is not available.

'I think that "outreach" workers are often overlooked, underestimated and dismissed... in reality they are the most connected, have vast networks, have more knowledge and insight into a multitude of systems such as benefits, immigration, housing legislation, alcohol and substance misuse – underestimate an outreach worker at your peril!'

Frontline worker in Cornwall, Local Government

5. **Poor wellbeing can exist alongside a strong sense of purpose.** Frontline workers frequently described their work as meaningful and rewarding, but also reported pressure from workload, low pay, limited resources and repeatedly being unable to act on what they know someone needs.

6. **Pay and recognition matter not only for financial security but also for whether workers feel the expertise and responsibility involved in their role are valued.** Retaining experienced workers also helps retain knowledge, relationships and expertise which take time to build.

'I get to walk alongside people who are taking brave steps towards a future where they can thrive, which is inspiring and rewarding. I get to be part of a supportive, purpose-driven, fun team of colleagues.'

Frontline worker in Croydon, Charity

'I feel that frontline workers in homeless services are seriously undervalued, under-appreciated and under paid for the expertise, experience and empathy that they bring to the role. Our jobs are becoming increasingly difficult, we are under pressure, this will continue in a downward spiral until there are major changes.'

Belfast, Housing Association/ Registered Social Landlord

RECOMMENDATIONS

ACCESS TO ACCOMMODATION AND SUPPORT

1. **National and local governments should increase the supply of settled self-contained accommodation at scale.** Housing associations, funders and charities should work together to develop, fund or secure accommodation that reflects local need and the needs and circumstances of individuals and families experiencing homelessness.

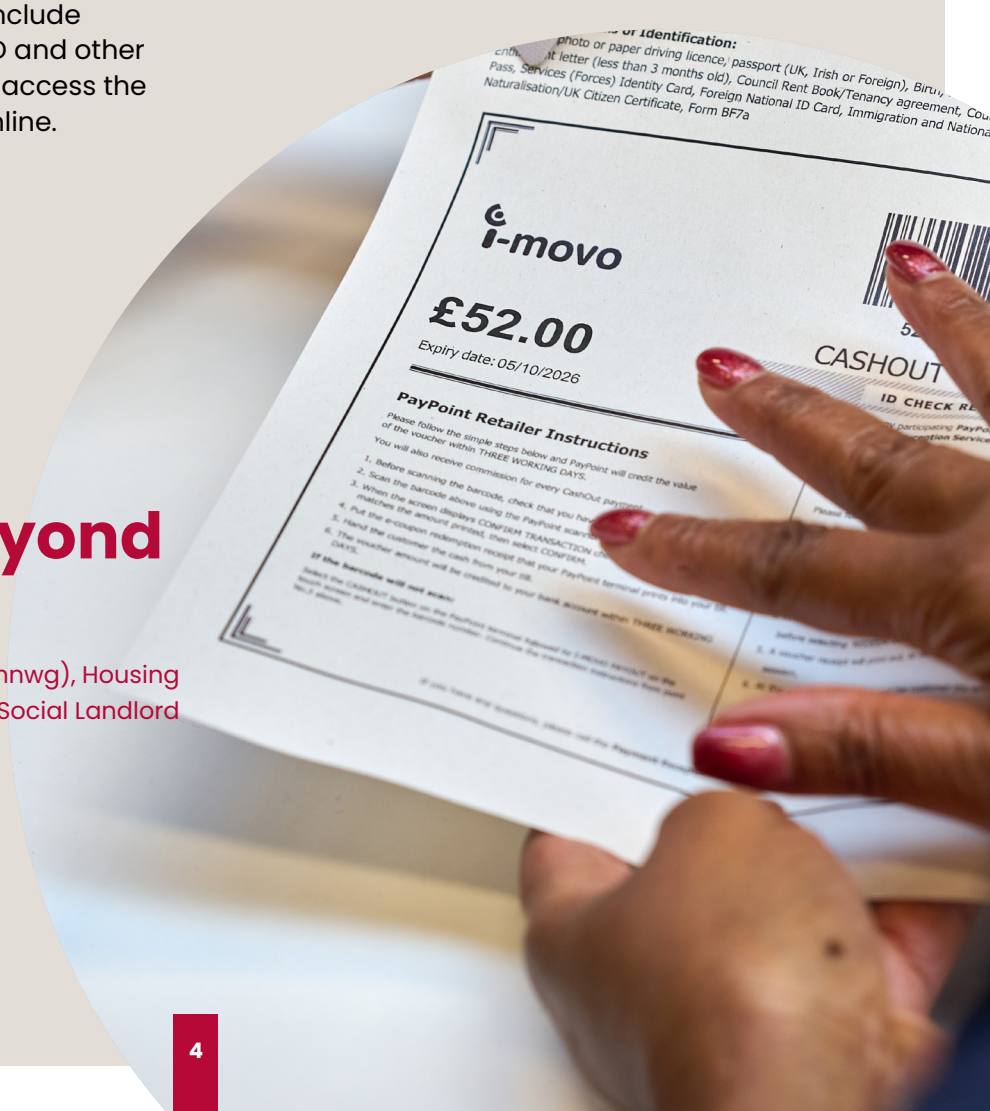
2. **The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) should restore Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rates to the 30th percentile of local rents** and maintain them at this level, so that people receiving LHA can access private rented accommodation.

3. **Local and national services should remove unnecessary administrative and eligibility barriers to accessing housing and other support.** Services should take account of the challenges faced by people experiencing homelessness and be flexible in enabling them to access support in a way that is possible for them. This might include flexibility over requirements for ID and other documentation, or whether they access the service in person, by phone or online.

4. **Governments should provide more guidance on fair assessment of affordability and the proportionate use of guarantors.** This would help to enable those receiving income from benefits to be considered on equal terms with other prospective tenants.

5. **Governments should create realistic options for people with No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) who are destitute or homeless.** This should include access to emergency accommodation and enough support to give people stability to resolve their situation, so that, where possible, they can move towards self-sufficiency.

6. **Increase access to timely, publicly funded specialist legal advice and representation** where legal issues put people at risk of homelessness or prevent them from accessing the housing and support to which they are entitled.



‘Housing is beyond our control.’

Vale of Glamorgan (Bro Morgannwg), Housing Association / Registered Social Landlord

WORKFORCE

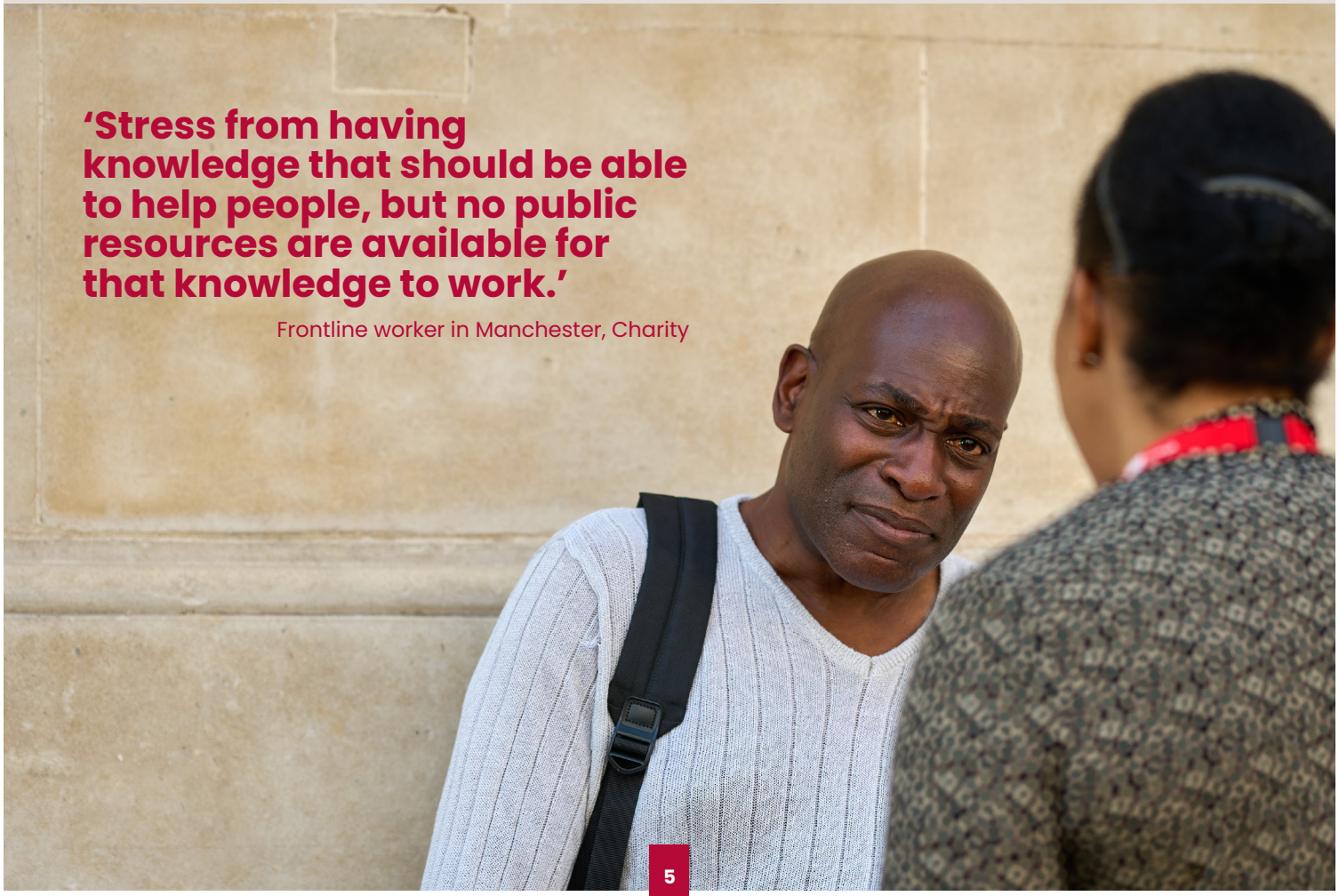
1. **Governments should ensure funding and commissioning frameworks provide sufficient resources to enable organisations to recruit, retain, develop the skills of and support frontline workers.** They should ensure the real costs of frontline support are reflected in contract values and, wherever possible, look to fund longer contracts to reduce discontinuity in care, as well as uncertainty and staff turnover when a contract is coming to an end.

2. **Funders and commissioners should fund services sufficiently to recognise the expertise and responsibility involved in frontline work,** enabling staff to be paid fairly and helping organisations retain experienced staff.

3. **Policymakers should create formal opportunities for frontline workers to contribute** their expertise when homelessness policy is designed, implemented and reviewed.

4. **Organisations should address the conditions that affect wellbeing, including high workloads, inadequate support and pressure to work beyond role boundaries.** They should also recognise that, even once these conditions are dealt with, frontline homelessness work can continue to have a significant negative impact on wellbeing due to challenging cases, emotional demands and situations where they are not able to overcome resource constraints to take action they know is needed. Meaningful support should be made available to help staff manage these pressures.

5. **Organisations should give frontline workers the time and opportunities they need to maintain and develop their expertise,** including relevant training, learning from colleagues and access to specialist knowledge and advice when dealing with issues beyond their role.



‘Stress from having knowledge that should be able to help people, but no public resources are available for that knowledge to work.’

Frontline worker in Manchester, Charity

St Martin-in-the-Fields Charity is a homelessness charity that works UKwide 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.





All images use models to represent real people ©Steve Francks

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