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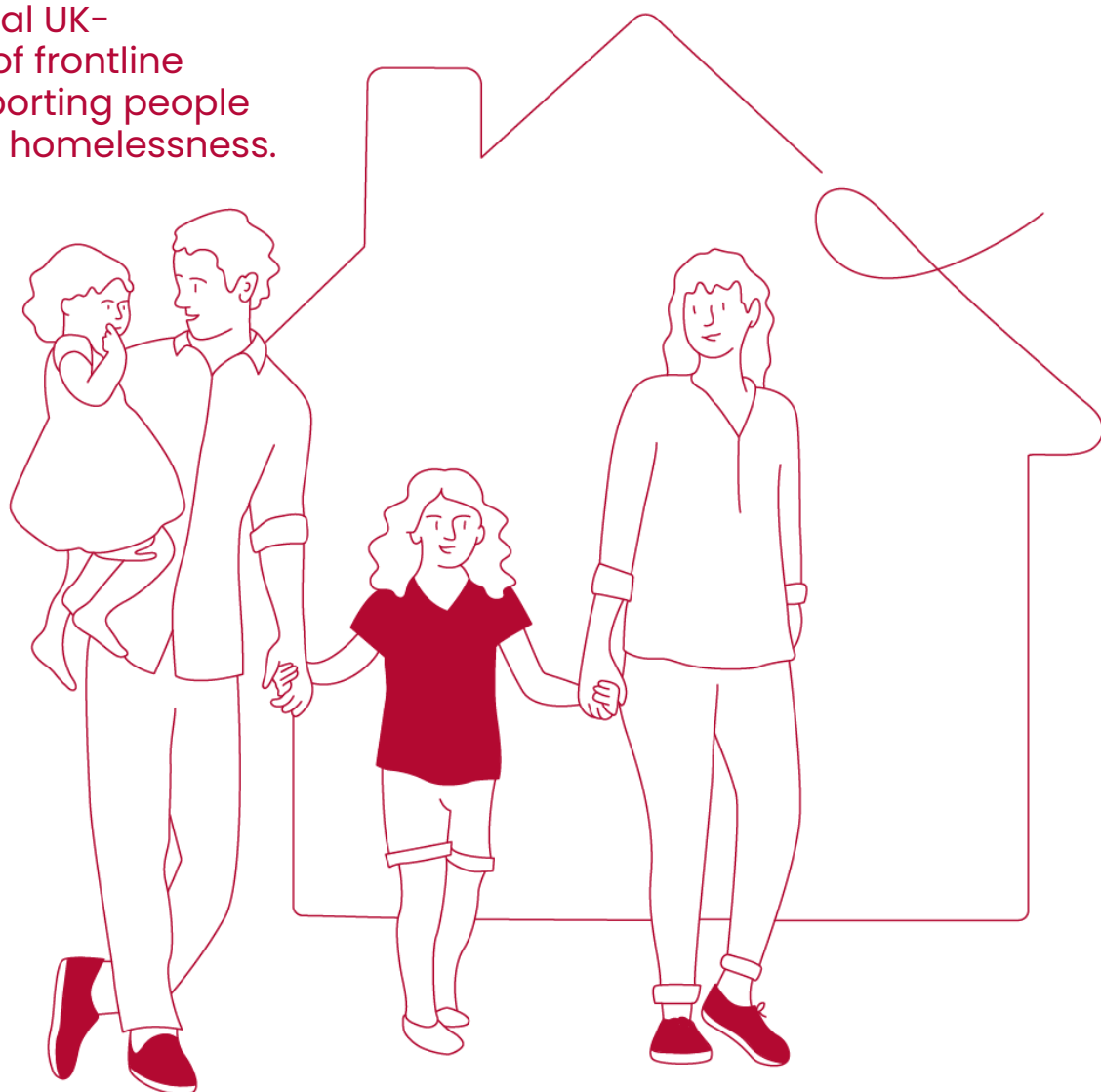


**Frontline
Network**

Annual Frontline Worker Survey 2024

Executive Summary

The 7th annual UK-wide survey of frontline workers supporting people experiencing homelessness.



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St Martin-in-the-Fields Charity
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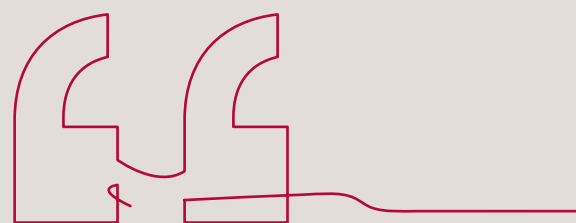
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St Martin-in-the-Fields Charity works across the UK. Our goal is to prevent homelessness and when it does occur, ensure people receive the best possible support that enables them to secure and keep a safe place to live. We do this by making grants to individuals and organisations to improve access to accommodation, and by supporting frontline workers through the Frontline Network.

Since 2017, we have been capturing the perspectives and concerns of frontline workers as their role is critical to helping people out of homelessness or preventing it occurring in the first place. This report is drawn from the findings of the 2024 survey offering a snapshot of the experiences of staff preventing or supporting people out of homelessness. This year 1,050 frontline workers from across the UK responded to the survey highlighting their experiences of addressing homelessness as well as the challenges they face as a frontline worker. This report also considers changes since the last survey in 2022.

Listening to lived and frontline experience is crucial to addressing homelessness.

This year's report is being published against the backdrop of the continuing impact of the cost-of-living crisis and high and rising homelessness so it is even more important that these insights are heard and can help shape future policy and practice. The latest official statistics on homelessness in England shows that nearly a hundred thousand (94,560) households approached their local authority for help between January and March 2024 and 11,993 people were seen sleeping rough in London alone in the year to March 2024 – the highest figure on record.



“We struggle to house some clients who have gone round the system several times and may have some specific needs that are deemed “unmanageable” by housing (i.e. arson, criminal damage, drug dealing, etc.). There is also an increased demand for housing support without an equally increased housing offer, so there is a significant waiting time to access temporary accommodation.”

Frontline Worker, Portsmouth

Key Findings:

Analysis of the responses to the survey shows increased demand for homelessness services:

84% of homelessness workers reported increased demand for their services in the 12 months before January 2024.

At the same time **58%** of workers reported their ability to help people access appropriate accommodation to help people out of homelessness had decreased (up from 42% in 2022).

Frontline workers are themselves under pressure from the costs-of-living crisis and the challenges of the role with their own health and wellbeing affected:

- over half (**53%**) of homelessness workers said they were struggling to pay their bills at least some of the time and **44%** struggled to pay their own housing costs
- nearly a quarter (**23%**) of workers are worrying about becoming homeless themselves at least some of the time
- half (**51%**) of workers reported that they 'always' or 'often' feel at risk of burnout

Despite these challenges the results show that frontline workers are determined to secure the best possible outcomes for the people with whom they are working.

This report sets out a series of recommendations for change to ensure homelessness workers can be better supported to do their job and for their own wellbeing.

“In the majority of circumstances, it is difficult to find and access support - every organisation is overworked and underfunded. It usually takes a minimum of several months to access support by which time circumstances have often changed/worsened.”

Frontline Worker, Southampton

“There is now such a huge strain on resources for housing and services that it's so difficult to help our clients access some services. Move on is much harder because of the costs of rents, and lack of rented accommodation. People are stuck in the circle of homelessness.”

Frontline Worker, Brighton and Hove



Increased demand for homelessness services



84% of frontline workers said that there was increased demand for the homelessness service that they work for during the 12 months prior to January 2024 (compared to 78% as reported in the last survey).



89% of respondents are supporting people who are at risk of rent arrears.



89% of people being supported are at risk of eviction.



86% of frontline workers are supporting individuals who are currently sleeping rough.



Yet the lack of housing options means it's harder to house people



93% of frontline workers reported that it was difficult or very difficult to obtain private rented accommodation for the people they support.



47% of workers (up from 33% in 2022) said their ability to prevent homelessness had decreased.

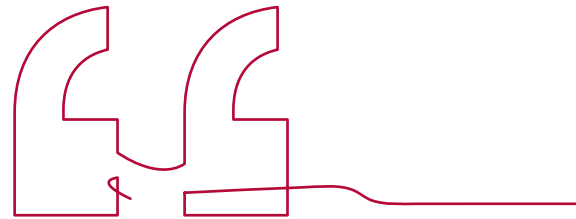
“It is so much harder to help people access accommodation that is affordable and available to them, especially if they are reliant on income related benefits and not in employment. Social housing is increasingly not a reality for many clients, but they very often cannot afford the high payments of private rentals especially with the rise in prices.”

Frontline Worker, East Lindsey

Unsafe and unsuitable housing

92% of homelessness workers replying to the survey said that they found it difficult or very difficult to obtain 'suitable' housing for the people they are supporting, with workers reporting concerns in particular around:

- children who are being placed into B&Bs or other temporary accommodation without enough space
- people facing safeguarding risks who cannot be moved away from abusive family members due to a lack of alternative housing options
- supporting people who experience multiple challenges relating to mental health, substance use, offending and long-term homelessness or rough sleeping where workers are finding it especially difficult to find housing appropriate to their needs



Challenges accessing wider support services and increased levels of destitution

88%

of respondents said they are supporting people who are going hungry.

90%

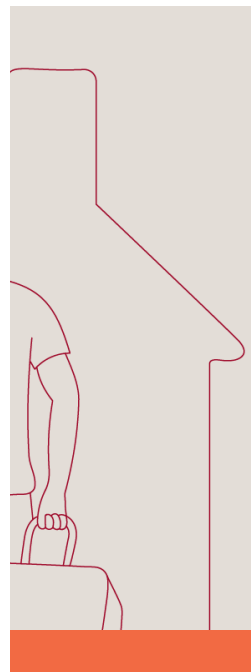
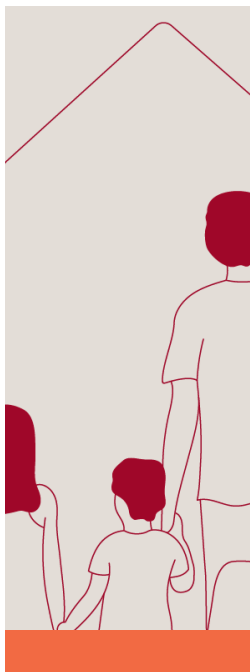
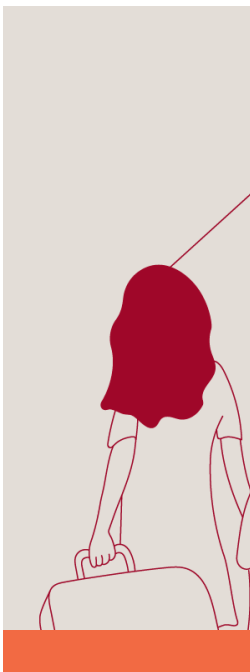
of respondents said that waiting lists were a barrier to accessing support either always or often. 49% said 'always' in 2024 compared to 38% in 2022.

77%

of respondents said that it was either 'very difficult' or 'difficult' to access mental health support for the people they are supporting.

"I've noticed a deterioration in various advice services as funding is cut and pressures increase. Specialist services around benefits, pensions, immigration etc. often end up signposting to each other in an endless circle until clients give up and stop engaging."

Frontline worker, Lewisham




"The lack of supply means that we are re-arranging the deck chairs on the Titanic! A frontline homeless officer's job is as much about expectation management as it is about assessing statutory duties."

Frontline Worker, Essex

Frontline Workers Themselves Are Under Pressure

Hit by rising living costs

→  **52%** of workers said that they were struggling to pay their bills at least some of the time.

→  **44%** said that they struggled to pay their housing costs at least some of the time

Despite these financial difficulties

→  **47%** found themselves spending their own money on work related costs such as travel, training or buying a coffee or sandwich when meeting a client at least sometimes.

And with their own wellbeing affected

→  **51%** of frontline homelessness workers said that they always or often feel at risk of burnout and a further 29% said they sometimes feel this way, a total of 80% of frontline workers.

→  **64%** of frontline workers feel that their role has a negative impact on their wellbeing (up from 58% in 2022) and only 47% of frontline workers reported feeling secure in their jobs.

“Everyone is exhausted and struggling to live. Standard wage is £19,000 a year. How do you expect people to live on that?”

Frontline Worker, Merthyr Tydfil

“Doing this job means I can almost never deal with any additional life stress.”

Frontline Worker, Leeds

“The hordes of people in Temporary Accommodation [TA], particularly single people could be out of TA, or have had their homelessness prevented beforehand if supported housing was not diminishing and/or only being commissioned by Tier one authorities for those with social care needs, not others with different vulnerabilities who need support but have not been accepted as meeting the very high adult social care thresholds.”

Frontline worker,
East of England

“I have an amazing team within my office, and we are very supportive of each other. However, I just think the role wears heavy on all workers.”

Frontline Worker, Argyll and Bute

“There is a big squeeze on there being suitable temporary accommodation available, so some people may often end up negotiating ways to be 'homeless at home'.”

Frontline Worker, Yorkshire and the Humber

“I have worked with a number of clients this year who have finally been able to access social housing, only to move into properties with no furniture or appliances and often with significant repair issues (leaks, mould, damp).”

Frontline Worker, London

“We need big structural changes, including increased availability of social housing, funding of public services, and a transformation of attitudes towards homeless and multiply marginalised people. This is more than individual organisations can achieve alone and requires coordinated collective demands from the sector.”

Frontline Worker, Manchester

“With increasing lack of affordable housing and a significant increase in no fault section 21 evictions we have reached a housing emergency. Due to lack of housing options, I feel I am not able to properly help clients, and this has worsened every year. It is extremely disheartening and takes its toll on my wellbeing. This is why I want to leave this line of work.”

Frontline Worker, Hackney

Despite all the Challenges, the Homelessness Sector is Resilient and Innovative

Frontline services are finding new ways of responding to need, including through:

- **Co-locating support** – for example bringing clothing and food banks on site; providing drop in benefits advice; inviting other services into the same space to provide digital access
- **Adapting service hours** – increasing drop-in opportunities, opening for longer hours or more days
- **Partnership working** – conducting joint training

Many organisations are seeking to support their frontline workers

89% of workers said that they had the right level of skills and training for their jobs

83% of workers said their organisation operated in a trauma-informed way

70% of workers said they had the necessary training in operating in a trauma informed way (compared to 64% in 2022)

68% think their workplace has good workplace culture

Although challenges remain around workforce development

64% of workers reported that they felt that they were likely to continue to work in their role, with their own wellbeing the most likely reason not to do so, a decrease from 68% in 2022

46% of workers said that the main barrier to attending training was finding the time to attend, although access to training was generally reported to be good

“We have a new system to help us decide how much time to dedicate to individual clients (Red, Amber, Green) this means everyone gets the support required in a timely fashion.”

Frontline worker, Anglesey

“We have increased the amount of 2nd tier advice and rights awareness we provide to other organisations, to help upskill them to challenge the issues their clients are experiencing. We’ve found that by providing training and resources many non-homelessness support organisations can get good outcomes for clients without having to refer them to us for casework.”

Frontline Worker, Edinburgh

“We work very closely with other agencies, and I think this makes our area and co-operation of services unique to other areas.”

Frontline worker, Buckinghamshire



Our Recommendations

The survey has highlighted several different strands of action that are needed.

The new UK government and those across the devolved nations have committed to reducing and preventing homelessness. With homelessness at record levels, it is important that strategies, policies and funding to tackle and prevent homelessness respond to the issues raised in this survey including:



1

Recognising the essential role of frontline workers in the homelessness sector, some of whom also have lived experience, and ensuring they are supported and valued through efforts to reduce their costs of living, to ensure they are paid fairly and appropriately and to support and improve their wellbeing.

2

Ensuring more accommodation is available through building more social rented homes, investing in housing and support models suitable for people with multiple and complex needs, such as Housing First and taking action to improve quality, stability and affordability in the private rented sector.

3

Investing in homelessness services through ensuring funding levels and commissioning practices nationally and locally across the UK are appropriate, equitable and long-term to both ensure quality support is available to prevent and resolve homelessness and to support the recruitment and retention of skilled staff.

4

Ensuring funding and programmes are informed and shaped by learning and experience, including being designed with meaningful input from frontline workers including those with lived experience, so that they reflect the needs experienced by those carrying out frontline work e.g. policies and processes for reimbursement of work-related expenses, and are trauma-informed and support wellbeing.

5

Concerted action to tackle the cost-of-living, including through ensuring benefits are at an appropriate level and providing immediately available, easily accessible, flexible pots of money to support people with rent arrears, deposits, the costs of moving, and setting up a new home (e.g. for white goods and flooring).



““We are seeing the impact of a decade of cuts to services in all areas of our work.”

Frontline Worker, Exeter

In 2024/5 at St Martin-in-the-Fields Charity, we ourselves commit to:

- Distributing £2m in small emergency grants to help thousands of people to access new accommodation and prevent eviction
- Funding organisations to deliver mental health support to people experiencing homelessness in a non-clinical setting and person-centred way
- Developing a new fund to overcome barriers to homelessness, increasing our training and support offer for frontline workers and raising their concerns with policy makers

How to get involved:

- If you are a frontline homelessness worker, please find out more about our funding, community and resources and how we can help you with training and other support at frontlinenetwork.org.uk
- If you would like to find out anything more about the survey or the findings and policy and practice implications, please contact frontline@stmartinscharity.org.uk

“Services for mental health and addiction is extremely difficult to access. Due to lack of services when people are being housed, they do not have the wrap around service they need to support them to sustain their tenancies and, in many cases, due to the lack of support they cause issues which leads to eviction and then they end up back in the system going around and around in circles.”

Frontline Worker, Belfast



“....it feels like continual firefighting and trying to deal with many crises all the time.”

Frontline Worker, Merton

Survey Methodology

The 2024 survey was carried out between 8th January and 5th February: this report is drawn from those findings. This report also considers changes since the last survey, carried out in November and December 2022, reported on in March 2023 (thus referred to 2022 findings). We have been listening to the frontline workforce in this way since 2017.

The findings from the Annual Frontline Worker Survey 2024 provide a snapshot of staff experiences supporting people out of homelessness. This year 1,050 frontline workers responded to the survey, highlighting experiences of addressing homelessness as well as frontline work. We listen to the frontline workforce in order to better understand their needs, the challenges in the context of their work, and their successes. This data and the nuance provided through their testimonies and living experiences informs not only our practice and funding but acts as an evidence base for workers and leaders to both improve practice across the sector, and act for policy change.

Who replied to the Survey?

55% worked for a registered charity

54% of organisations had more than 100 employees

76% of services represented covered urban areas and large towns

71% of respondents were dedicated frontline workers with no line management responsibilities

36% have been frontline workers for more than 10 years

12% were previously users of homelessness services themselves

4% are current users of homelessness services themselves while simultaneously supporting their clients

12% of respondents declared their services are primarily based in Wales

8% from each of Northern Ireland and Scotland - reflective of the proportional workforces across the four nations, and their specific strengths, needs, and contextual challenges

9% have been undertaking this kind of work for less than 12 months





St Martin-in-the-Fields Charity is a UK-wide homelessness charity. Our goal is that homelessness is prevented, but that when it does occur, people receive the best possible support that enables them to secure and keep a safe place to live. We do this through a three-fold approach of giving grants to individuals and to organisations, supporting frontline workers and influencing decision makers to affect change. We give small emergency grants to help thousands of people each year move into new accommodation or to prevent eviction.

We are passionate about the role, value and importance of frontline workers. We work with thousands of frontline workers every year to provide the best support possible for people facing homelessness offering training, funding and bringing 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 solution-focused practice. We share experiences and insights with local and national decision makers – amplifying the voices of frontline workers and the people they support.

“Benefits do not provide people with enough to meet their living costs without getting into debt if they have a change of circumstances. There is not enough choice of emergency accommodation and not enough social housing. There are increasingly not enough private landlords who will let to people with credit issues, who cannot get a guarantor, and it is very hard to get support for rough sleepers with them increasingly being deemed not a priority despite clear vulnerabilities and health issues. It is honestly becoming almost unbearable to witness so many people struggling to access support and not being able to address the underlying social determinants of why homelessness and rough sleeping are still a significant issue. You want to help people but the tools and resources are ever dwindling to be able to move them forwards.”

Frontline worker, East Lindsey



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