



Housing Support Workers in Scotland

Contents

Summary	2
Key Messages	2
Context	3
The Work Undertaken by Housing Support Workers	4
In what settings do housing support workers work?	4
What work is undertaken by housing support workers?	4
Qualifications and Professional Development	7
Case Studies and Examples	8
1. Practitioner in Visiting Housing Support	8
2. Sheltered Housing Coordinator	9
3. Housing First Practitioner	10
4. Housing Support to Sustain a Tenancy	11
Conclusions and Recommendations	13

Summary

The role of a housing support worker is uniquely placed between social care and tenancy management. While work has been undertaken around professional development of both the social care and housing workforce separately, the role of housing support workers is distinct and not always well understood.

This briefing is written:

- To aid those involved in the commissioning and funding of housing support services to understand the role of housing support workers.
- For providers of housing support services.
- For regulators of housing support services.
- For people interested in becoming a housing support worker.

This briefing also includes insight and case studies informed by conversations with housing support workers working in different services across Scotland.

Key Messages

<p>1. Housing support workers help people to fulfil their human rights to independent living and adequate housing.</p> 	<p>2. The skilled work undertaken by housing support workers enables people to continue to live safely and engage in their communities.</p> 
<p>3. Housing support workers are uniquely positioned to facilitate individually tailored support and collaboration across services.</p> 	<p>4. Sustainable funding is necessary to allow housing support services to maintain and develop service capacity with a skilled workforce.</p> 

Context

Housing support workers play an important and distinct role in providing preventative services that enable independent living. While housing support workers are employed in diverse services, the role is characterised by the skilled work undertaken to help people live independently and achieve their own goals. As of 2022, 74,640 people were working in regulated housing support and care at home services in Scotland, representing 35% of the total social care workforce.¹

Recent policy indicates that housing support workers will continue to play a key role in enabling preventative social care services and allowing people to fulfil their human rights to adequate housing and independent living. For example, the Programme for Government 23-24 committed Housing First as ‘the default response for people experiencing homelessness who have multiple and complex needs.’² Housing support is a vital aspect of Housing First and enabling people to maintain their tenancies successfully. The Bail and Release Bill, passed in 2023, brings in new duties for public bodies to engage in release planning for prisoners, including new standards for throughcare support.³ The Coming Home Implementation Plan was created to work towards real change with out-of-area residential placements and inappropriate hospital stays greatly reduced.⁴ Links with housing are vital in enabling people to move out of hospital to the right setting with the right level of support. These policy developments indicate that the demand on housing support services and consequent demand for housing support workers will continue to grow.

¹The SSSC records the number of people working in housing support/ care at home services combined.

¹ <https://data.sssc.uk.com/images/WDR/WDR2022.pdf>

² <https://www.gov.scot/binaries/content/documents/govscot/publications/strategy-plan/2023/09/programme-government-2023-24/documents/equality-opportunity-community-programme-government/equality-opportunity-community-programme-government/govscot%3Adocument/equality-opportunity-community-programme-government.pdf>

³ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/asp/2023/4/section/12/enacted>

⁴ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/coming-home-implementation-report-working-group-complex-care-delayed-discharge/>

The Work Undertaken by Housing Support Workers

In what settings do housing support workers typically work?

- People's homes.
- Supported housing developments.
- Homelessness services.
- Core and cluster settings, where people live in independent self-contained accommodation supported by a central hub.

Housing support workers may be employed by local authorities, housing associations, voluntary organisations, or private organisations. In the 2022-23 financial year, social landlords employed over 3,500 care and support staff.⁵

What work is undertaken by housing support workers?

Housing support workers work across different settings **to help people live independently, be actively engaged in their community, and fulfil their rights to independent living and adequate housing**. Housing support workers work with a range of people facing homelessness, people experiencing addictions, older people, people with mental health problems, disabled people, women facing domestic abuse, and people with learning disabilities. **Housing support workers can help people access health or social care services, support people to become involved in activities, and assist people to achieve their own goals**. Other responsibilities may include:

- Reviewing and adapting support plans based on people's needs.
- Assisting to set up a tenancy.
- Supporting to improve independent living skills.
- Supporting to improve finances including maximising benefits.
- Referring to activities to reduce social isolation, increase social networks and develop personal skills.
- Support towards digital inclusion.
- Referring people to other specialist services.
- Assisting people to use other public services.

⁵ <https://www.housingregulator.gov.scot/landlord-performance/statistical-information/>

The diversity of housing support services, and people who use housing support, means that the duties undertaken by housing support workers vary.

For example, some housing support workers are employed to work in accommodation supporting people experiencing homelessness. In these services, housing support workers may be working through the night to provide on-site support. In contrast, other roles, such as a floating housing support worker may include visits to different people in their own homes, for as little as an hour a week. Floating housing support workers work with anyone who has their own tenancy or is a homeowner but who may need support to maintain their tenancy or home ownership and continue to live independently. Other housing support worker roles involve working in supported housing developments, with older people or people with learning disabilities.

Regardless of the intended outcomes of the service, housing support workers all play an important role in helping the people they support to live independently. **Housing support workers use preventative approaches to encourage people to be more proactive about their wellbeing, work towards increased independence, and a reduced or delayed need for further care and support services.** The role of a housing support worker is uniquely situated to work between sectors and in collaboration with other professions. Housing support is often embedded as part of a broader package of care and support. The CaCHE report on the Economic and Social Benefits of Housing Support commented that the housing support worker role ‘...is particularly good at crossing institutional and divisional boundaries to develop networking opportunities and facilitate support between communities.’⁶ Housing support workers may also accept and make referrals between other services,

Housing First

Some housing support workers work in **Housing First services**, where settled housing is combined with person-centred and flexible support for people whose homelessness is made harder by experiences with trauma, addictions and mental health. The national strategy for Housing First in Scotland has recognised that ‘day-to-day support work is a role that requires a significant level of expertise, energy, confidence, patience and discretion.’⁷ Housing First workers will also have a smaller caseload, than other housing support workers, due to the intensity and tailored nature of the support provided.



⁶ <https://housingevidence.ac.uk/publications/economic-benefits-of-housing-support/>

⁷ <https://homelessnetwork.scot/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/National-Framework-3.3.23.pdf>

including housing, social work, Citizens Advice Bureau and GPs.⁷ In addition to referrals, by liaising with other services, including handyman services, financial advice, health, and adaptations, housing support workers are able to link the people they support with a wider network of services to help them stay safe and well at home.

Housing support workers are also involved in support planning to assist the people using services receive the right support. Through using outcomes-monitoring tools, support workers create individually tailored support plans for people using housing support.⁸ Tailored support planning enables progress to be tracked over time. The support planning undertaken by housing support workers is key, with the Care Inspectorate, who inspect regulated housing support services, recognising that good quality support planning enables people to receive the right type of support and maximises people's capacity and ability to make choices.⁹ Support planning also provides commissioners of services evidence of service quality and outcomes met.

Going Digital

Increasingly, digital skills are utilised by housing support workers to enable technology enabled care in housing and digital inclusion.¹⁰ This can include adapting to new working methods and using digital tools to support better access to services and information for people using housing support to become more digitally included.¹¹ Housing support workers can also help people to access digital services and telecare. As part of the bridging role, housing support workers may now also liaise with care technologists to create digital care plans to include the provision and set-up of technology and devices.¹²



⁷ <https://housingevidence.ac.uk/publications/economic-benefits-of-housing-support/>

⁸ <https://www.ccpscotland.org/hseu/better-futures/>

⁹ <https://www.careinspectorate.com/images/documents/5967/QF%20%20for%20hss%20and%20oa%20services%20-%20Final.pdf.pdf>

¹⁰ <https://www.gov.scot/news/supporting-access-to-online-services/>

¹¹ <https://www.techousing.co.uk/how>

¹² <https://scottishcare.org/the-care-technologist-project/>

Qualifications and Professional Development

There is not a specific fixed route to start working in housing support.

Many housing support workers work within regulated services. Those who work in regulated services will be registered with the Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC). The SSSC is the regulator for the social care workforce in Scotland and supports the professional development of the sector. This includes publishing national codes of practice for people working in social care, including housing support, to aid in regulating and improving the quality of social care.¹³ The work of some housing support workers is not regulated by the SSSC. This may include tenancy sustainment roles within housing organisations.

To qualify to be a SSSC registered housing support worker, you must have or be working towards a qualification.¹⁴ Qualifications can often be undertaken while in a role. The main qualifications are an HNC Social Services, SVQ Social Services and Healthcare SCQF Level 6, or any practice qualification in the supervisor category.¹⁵ There are also new qualifications tailored to equip people working in housing support with new digital skills, such as e-learning modules, and the professional development award in technology enabled care to support people in health, housing, and care contexts.¹⁶

There is opportunity for professional development and progression for those working in the housing support sector. For example, through the CIH, people already working in the housing or homelessness sectors can work towards a Level 3 Certificate in Providing Homelessness Services.¹⁷ Housing support workers will typically undertake other in-work training to help with their role. This may include first aid, welfare advice, and tenancy rights and management training.

Skills

Housing support workers use a range of specialist skills to effectively support people using services.

These may include:

- Communication
- Harm Reduction
- Supporting people with dementia
- Welfare advice
- Facilitating Telecare
- Support planning
- Safeguarding
- Using trauma-informed approaches
- Mental health first aid

¹³ <https://www.sssc.uk.com/the-scottish-social-services-council/sssc-codes-of-practice/>

¹⁴ <https://www.sssc.uk.com/knowledgebase/article/KA-02533/en-us>

¹⁵ <https://www.sssc.uk.com/registration/help-with-register-parts-fees-and-qualifications/>

¹⁶ <https://www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/94657.html>

¹⁷ <https://www.cih.org/cih-qualifications/level-3-certificate-in-providing-homelessness-services>

Case Studies and Examples

Below are some illustrative case studies, to demonstrate the breadth of roles in the housing support sector. While these case studies are informed by the experience of housing support workers, real names have not been used to protect privacy.

1. Practitioner in Visiting Housing Support



Ailsa works for a large third sector organisation in a visiting housing support service. The floating housing support service helps people in their own homes to budget, move between tenancies, set up utilities, arrange medical appointments, and other support to foster and maintain independence. Support is centred around what people want and is delivered at a minimum of three hours per week. This support begins with a risk and baseline assessment, with people then agreeing to an offer of support. More recently, Ailsa is working in a more specialist way with people who hoard. Through this service, Ailsa accompanies a person from their interim placement in a care home, back to their own home four times a week for three hours to offer support in making their home safer and more habitable. Ailsa has undertaken specialised training to better support people who hoard.

For Ailsa, her role centres on building strong relationships with the people being supported. This includes offering consistency, and assuring people that you will be there to meet them when agreed, every week. Other skills Ailsa uses include active listening, empathy, patience, and resilience. It is important that she is non-judgemental and caring towards those being supported. A challenge of working as a practitioner in a visiting housing support service can be managing one's own expectations, which may be different than the expectations and needs of a service user. The uncertainty of sustainable funding can also be challenging, with Ailsa concerned about how the people she supports will continue to get the right type of support, if funding does not continue. Ailsa works on the basis that everyone is entitled to support and can feel frustrated when the people she supports face stigma and judgement.

Ailsa enjoys the flexibility of her role; there is not a specific way of working or of doing things when supporting people. There is also a lot of variety within the role. She previously had worked as a neighbourhood warden, and enjoyed the work being in communities and building strong relationships, which were skills that translate well to working in housing support. Ailsa feels a lot of job satisfaction when the people she supports meet and exceed their own expectations.

2. Sheltered Housing Coordinator

Laura is employed by a large housing association that specialises in housing and support for older people. She works as the coordinator in a mid-size sheltered housing development designed for people over the age of 60. Sheltered housing is designed to support older people to live independently, while benefitting from on-site support. Laura works from 9am to 5pm, five days a week, as the only on-site housing association employee. Laura's role includes seeing tenants everyday, undertaking risk assessments, creating personal plans, and ensuring the safety and security of the development. Within her role, she collaborates with colleagues in both statutory and voluntary services, including telecare, home care, social work, community nursing, GPs, and mental health.



Laura helps to deliver a person-centred service. Her knowledge and relationships with tenants mean that she is able to assess the support that people need, and how this may change. This includes helping tenants to plan ahead for what type of housing support or care they may want in the future, whether this is a move to a care home or to supported housing. Laura's role includes the reviewing of personal plans, which are reviewed every six months with information about medical history, next of kin, power or attorney, mental health, and preferences. This helps with monitoring what actions have been taken to improve wellbeing. The role of sheltered housing coordinator is challenging, with unique demands of lone working and pressure on one's time.

Before working in sheltered housing, Laura worked as a qualified Social Worker, and had worked within criminal justice and community care. She has enjoyed

using her skills from previous roles to work in sheltered housing, which include communication, empathy, and openness. Because of her social work qualification, Laura has not undertaken any role-specific qualifications, with training from her employer focusing on topics including infection control, safety and security, and fire safety. Laura values the autonomy that the role allows to make decisions about what tasks will best support tenant's independence and wellbeing. Important skills in her role include being approachable, sympathetic, and a good communicator. One of the best parts of Laura's job is being able to learn alongside and from people of different ages and personalities.

3. Housing First Practitioner



Fiona works for a large third sector organisation, in a long-term housing support service, using the Housing First model. Support is provided to people facing homelessness with complex needs, in their own home and in the community. As a Housing First service, the support is intensive and tailored at helping people sustain their tenancies. Fiona's role includes visiting service user's homes, helping them set up utilities, helping them apply for benefits and other welfare funds, and attending appointments. The support focuses on helping people to get the things they need and can include managing income and debt.

Fiona was motivated to work in housing support based on family experience supporting someone with an addiction and wanting to give back, understanding the challenges of people facing substance misuse and their families. As a lead practitioner, Fiona works in partnership with housing, mental health services, Police Scotland, criminal justice services, and drug and alcohol services to support people. Her good relationship with people working in many different services helps to deliver the best outcomes for the people using the service, by creating a 'circle of support'. For Fiona, the most important skills to have as a housing support practitioner are patience, persistence, resilience, and empathy. In Fiona's role, it is important to be accepting and understanding of someone's circumstances, working on the understanding that 'everyone has a right to belong somewhere'. As a key feature of the Housing First service model, Fiona supports people for as long as they need it. The National Framework for scaling up

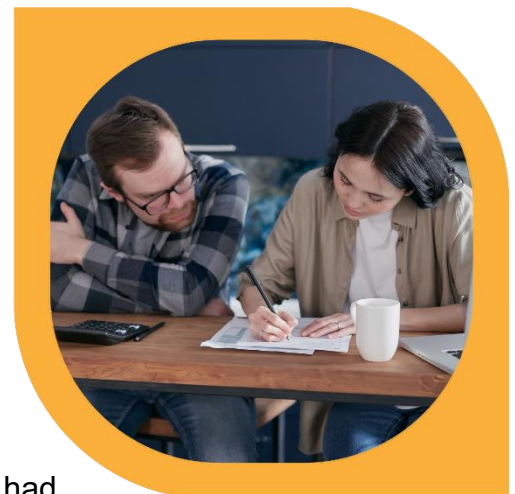
Housing First in Scotland acknowledges the close links between the success of Housing First and skilled staff, who must have a significant level of expertise, local knowledge, confidence, energy and patience in what can be a difficult role.¹⁸

Fiona has worked towards and completed her SVQ 3 while working in housing support, alongside other training in first aid, mental health first aid, harm reduction and substance misuse. As a registered housing support worker, she logs her personal learning on the SSSC app.

In her role as a practitioner, Fiona faces challenges in encouraging engagement from the people she supports, although she has developed skills and experience in building trust with people who have previously been let down by support systems. The expectations from other services can also be challenging; Fiona's work is person-centred and focuses on supporting people based on the outcomes that service users want to achieve. Fiona enjoys being able to see how long-term housing support helps people. 'I just love what I do, it's where I need to be.'

4. Housing Support to sustain a tenancy

Joan works for a regional housing association in their housing support service. The service Joan works in aims to provide low level, temporary support to help tenants stay in their homes and maintain their independence. This can include helping to fill out forms, help with referrals for furniture grants, help accessing utilities, and signposting to relevant services. Joan also creates support plans which are reviewed regularly, and uses outcomes monitoring tool, Better Futures, to help people find 'where they want to be and how to get there.' Joan came into the role from a social care background, where she had progressed to a senior manager operational role.



As a housing support worker at a housing association, Joan regularly works with social work, GPs, and her housing officer colleagues. Joan feels that sometime her role in housing support is not taken as seriously as other types of social care, which can have negative implications for partnership working with other agencies.

¹⁸ <https://homelessnetwork.scot/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/National-Framework-3.3.23.pdf>

Joan's prior role in social care prepared her with many transferrable skills to working in housing support.

Joan's role can be challenging as the service supports people with more complex needs in the context of reduced funding and availability of other social care services. The tenancy sustainment service run by the housing association has a maximum of 13 weeks of support. However, some people are supported for the 13 weeks, and then can be re-referred soon after support ends because they are not managing. Joan worries that the support she is able to offer through the housing support service is sometimes not sufficient for people's more complex needs, including serious mental or physical health problems.

Joan's role is also unique in the broad geographical spread of people she supports. Joan enjoys her role and the opportunity to meet people that she wouldn't otherwise. She also enjoys being part of a small, supportive team, 'I honestly love it.'

Conclusions and Recommendations

Housing support workers play an important role in supporting people to live successfully in their homes and communities. Quality relationship-based support relies on the varied skills and experiences of support workers. Housing Support is currently one of the parts of the social care workforce facing the greatest challenges in filling vacancies.¹⁹ In 2022, 77% of housing support services with vacancies reported problems filling them. In a [recent report of social care providers](#), (of which Housing Support made up 40% of those surveyed), 73% of respondents reported that their staff turnover rate increased in the past year.

Recommendations

1. The expertise, passion, and enthusiasm of housing support workers underpins high-quality relationship-based support. This enables people to live independently in their homes and communities, and must be properly recognised and championed.



2. It is important that services are sustainably funded to a level that supports the role of housing support workers, through pay, training, and professional development. Without sustainable funding of services, support providers may struggle with recruitment and retention of housing support workers.



¹⁹ <https://data.sssc.uk.com/data-publications/30-vacancy-reports/331-the-2022-staff-vacancies-in-care-services-report>

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About the HSEU

The aim of the Unit is to offer support and assistance to providers of housing support and supported housing across the voluntary sector, the private sector and to Registered Social Landlords. You can find out more about the work of the Unit on our website.

The HSEU is a partnership initiative between Coalition of Care and Support Providers Scotland (CCPS) and Scottish Federation of Housing Associations (SFHA) and funded by the Scottish Government.



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