



Giving shelter

Wardens' warnings on sheltered housing cuts

April 2018

The logo for UNISON Scotland, featuring the word "UNISON" in a bold, sans-serif font with a stylized wave graphic above it, and the word "Scotland" in a smaller, italicized font below it.

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Introduction

This report is part of UNISON Scotland's Damage series – a range of reports into the impact of austerity cuts on the delivery of public services. It looks at the issue facing our members working in sheltered housing. Most respondents work for local authorities, with the rest employed by housing associations.

The report also has some facts and figures from a freedom of information request to councils. We had responses from 30 councils, some of which do not have any sheltered housing, referring us to housing associations, while some have only council sheltered housing provision and others have their own and/or have contracts for/commission sheltered housing services.

(UNISON has long called for freedom of information legislation to be extended to cover all delivery of public services, whoever is providing the service. The Scottish Government has consulted on extending it to include housing associations/Registered Social Landlords. So hopefully for similar exercises in the future, we will be able to send the FOI request to them.)



Key issues

- A massive 90% of members who responded are worried about the impact of further cuts to hard-hit services in the next few years.
- Nearly half (47%) said there have already been major cuts, with another 14% reporting severe cuts.
- A total of 80% of respondents said their work role had changed in recent years.
- Members have real concerns for tenants, saying they are not getting to spend enough time with them, with resulting consequences for the wellbeing, health and safety of the elderly, often frail, people living in sheltered housing.
- Around a quarter of responses raised the issue of too much paperwork/computer work in comparison with time spent with tenants. Members also highlighted worries around giving medication without sufficient training, about being vulnerable due to lone working, and about supporting the complex needs of some tenants.
- It is very clear that all these workers give above and beyond because of their commitment to the job.
- A total of 57% of members said morale was low. The top of a list of concerns was "financial cuts hitting the service in the next few years", ticked by a massive 90%. Second and third, at 72%, was increased workload and "quality of service for tenants".
- Third was the impact of cuts on tenants being able to live independently, while fourth and fifth equal (64%) were "working between two or more sites" and short staffing. Other concerns included stress and other health and safety issues (62%), lone working (60%), the need for training (31%) and dealing with medications (17%).
- Responses from the FOI request showed overall fairly level numbers of staff and expenditure, but of course level spending is effectively a cut when rising costs and inflation are factored in and there were variations with some reporting big reductions, others increases.
- Noticeable, rather than incremental, change in spending included: Glasgow, where expenditure fell from £5.6m to £3m between 2013/14 and 2016/17 (and has been cut to zero now); Scottish Borders, down from £693k in 2013/14 to £497k in 2016/17; and Stirling, down from £157k to £86k, while Aberdeenshire increased from £2m to £4.3m, although staff numbers there went down slightly, 81 to 77. East Ayrshire spending went down from £169k to £100k (staff from 31 to 23) and East Dunbartonshire figures fell from £202k to £43k.
- Referring to further financial pressures on councils, one worker summed up: "As savings on millions of pounds have still to be made, I can't see the working environment easing at all. Staff leaving will continue to not be replaced. "Fewer staff will remain to do the work. The quality of current service to tenants will be difficult, if not impossible to maintain. Current staff provide a pro-active service to vulnerable clients. Time to work pro-actively may soon diminish or even disappear."



Summary

The members who responded to our survey came from 18 local authority areas and 89% are employed in local government, with 11% working for housing associations.

Most were sheltered housing wardens (49%) or sheltered housing officers (30%). There were some care/support workers (7%) with a small number of people in other roles, e.g. cleaner, housing officer/manager, cook.

A total of 80% of respondents said their work role had changed in recent years. Nearly half (47%) said there had been major cuts, with another 14% reporting severe cuts.

Reading the many comments made by members, who were clearly keen to speak out, can be upsetting. It is obvious how hard they work, often giving their own time because they care for the tenants they are there to support. But they say they are seriously struggling to have adequate time to spend with tenants and are very worried about the changes and cuts that have taken place already and any more coming down the line.

Around a quarter complained about the amount of paperwork/computer reports increasing, taking valued and important time away from direct work with tenants. One member said, "Managers are only interested in paperwork being up to date. So they can get more awards or high ratings from Care Inspectors. Tenants want the wardens' help, not us to fill forms in all the time."

Clearly paperwork is important for a range of valid reasons. The point is that the service should employ sufficient staff for both any necessary paperwork and the time that is needed with the elderly tenants. But numbers have been reducing.

Asked if there had been cuts to the number of sheltered housing officers (or equivalent posts) or reduction in hours, 62.5% said yes about posts gone, with 71% saying this was by a small amount, but more than a quarter (27%) reporting the reduction was "considerable". A total of 35% reported a reduction in the number of hours/days worked (e.g. no weekend working/shorter hours in each complex). And 41% said there had been a reduction in the number of other staff.

This means there are longer periods where tenants rely on an alarm/call button type of "telecare" service.

Unsurprisingly in such circumstances, 57% of members responding said morale was low. One question listed a range of issues that we knew might be concerning people. Members were asked to tick "as many as you think are a worry". The top concern was "financial cuts hitting the service in the next few years", ticked by a massive 90%. Second and third, at 72%, was increased workload and "quality of service for tenants".

Third was the impact of cuts on tenants being able to live independently, while fourth and fifth equal (64%) were „working between two or more sites" and short staffing. Other concerns included stress and other health and safety issues (62%), lone working (60%), the need for training (31%) and dealing with medications (17%).

Even where members felt things were generally good, they had major concerns about some aspects of their work.

One member working for a council said: "The need to administer more controlled medications such as methadone is a worry. Although staffing is pretty good we still quite often work short, which is fine when needs are low but a real struggle when extra support (hoisting, stand aids, end of life care) are needed for more than one tenant."



Summary

Asked what reasons had been given for cuts, one council worker said: "We have not been told anything other than management are waiting on outcomes of Local Housing Allowance figures to come through as they may have to cut funding further." Ongoing concerns about changes to housing benefit and universal credit and the way supported accommodation is funded have put pressure on the sector, including for planning future services.

However, the UK Government has withdrawn a much criticised plan to cap local housing allowance which was seen as a major threat to funding for sheltered housing and other supported accommodation.

Responses from the FOI request showed overall fairly level numbers of staff and expenditure, but of course level spending is effectively a cut when rising costs and inflation are factored in and there were variations with some reporting big reductions, others increases.

Noticeable rather than incremental change in spending included Glasgow, where expenditure fell from £5.6m to £3m between 2013/14 and 2016/17 (and has been cut to zero now); Scottish Borders, down from £693k in 2013/14 to £497k in 2016/17; and Stirling, down from £157k to £86k, while Aberdeenshire increased from £2m to £4.3m, although staff numbers there went down slightly, 81 to 77. East Ayrshire spending went down from £169k to £100k (staff from 31 to 23) and East Dunbartonshire figures fell from £202k to £43k.

The impact on staff as these cuts are imposed is often overwhelming. Our members go above and beyond in doing their best for the people they work with. Many made comments like this: "Very high and stressful workload. I work alone so am responsible for the support of over 50 individuals. Some have very complex needs and trying to identify, manage and document everything is difficult. Never enough hours in the day!"

Others expressed concern that social activities for tenants were reduced or cut altogether, or cancelled when staff were ill or on holiday as no cover was available.

There were a number of comments about worries around medication and suitable training. One member working in very sheltered housing said: "It really concerns me that care and support staff are administering medication throughout the day to tenants, whereas in a care home a nurse would do it. It is an unsafe practice. Staff are not paid enough to manage their medication."

UNISON urges policy makers to listen to what our members are saying and work with us to help protect and improve services. This should include ensuring that all those working in sheltered housing receive the Scottish Living Wage, meaning a drive for housing associations to pay the LW as part of efforts to ensure it is paid to all working on public contracts. Finally, changing ways of delivering supported accommodation to older people should be implemented with the purpose of improving and offering quality services, not to save money.

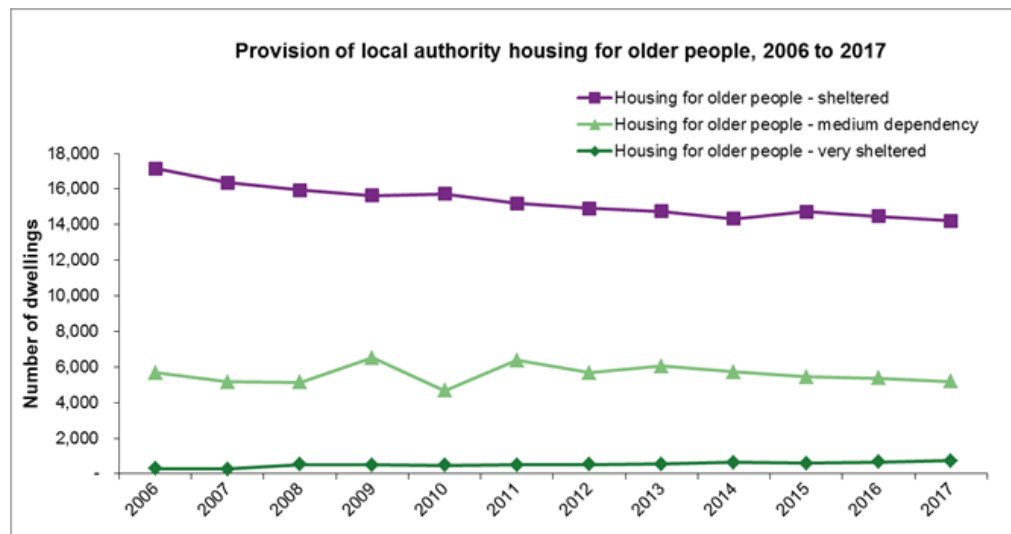


Background and FOI responses

Sheltered housing provision has been declining despite the common sense expectation that the need for it would be growing, given the ageing population. The Housing Statistics for Scotland 2017 Key Trends Summary notes:

“The number of sheltered, very sheltered and medium dependency houses provided by local authorities has decreased from 23,108 in 2006 to 20,126 in 2017.

The amount of very sheltered accommodation has increased from 290 in 2006 to 725 in 2016, whilst the amount of sheltered accommodation has dropped from 17,140 in 2006 to 14,216 in 2017.”



Housing Statistics for Scotland 2017 Key Trends Summary Chart 13
<http://www.gov.scot/Resource/0052/00524516.pdf>

A 2010 Scottish Government Analytical Paper on the impact of population ageing on housing in Scotland said: “In order to maintain current ratios of provision to probable need, the combined numbers of sheltered and very sheltered housing stock would need to rise from 38,000 in 2008/9, to 45,900 in 2018 and to 61,400 in 2033, a rise of 23,400 units over the period.”¹

However, the trend is currently downward. Figures for council provision and housing association provision combined, of sheltered and very sheltered housing, have fallen from 38,087 in 2008 to 36,686 in 2013.² The local authority figures for both types of housing has gone from 16,450 in 2008 to 15,311 in 2013 and 14,941 in 2017.

Thirty councils responded to our freedom of information request. (Angus and North Ayrshire did not.) Not all councils have their own sheltered housing provision. Several transferred theirs when their housing stock was transferred to registered social landlords/housing associations (e.g. Argyll & Bute, Dumfries & Galloway, Glasgow, Inverclyde and others). Some of those have contracts for sheltered housing provided by housing associations. Glasgow City Council has recently ended its funding for sheltered housing, which we refer to in detail below. Some councils have both their own provision and contracts with housing associations (e.g. South Ayrshire). Some have only their own provision e.g. Dundee. Perth & Kinross and Western Isles said they commission services from housing associations.

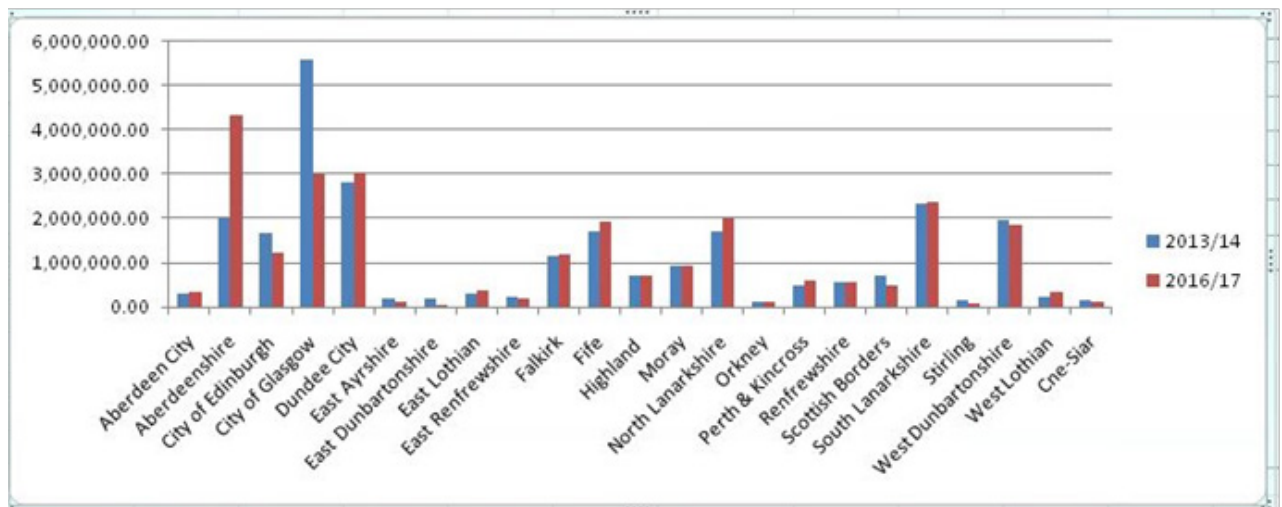
Such differences make it hard to make precise comparisons. We looked at staffing levels and at spending on sheltered housing. Both of these were fairly consistent in recent years, but of course, costs have been increasing and the population is ageing, so the expected trend should have been up. Indeed some councils saw increases, others cuts and without more details, it is not straightforward to know what was behind these variations. Some did not provide complete sets of figures for the years we were looking at, so comparisons are made only for those which did.

Background and FOI responses

The total number of staff employed by councils in sheltered housing, from the responses received, has stayed fairly consistent over the last few years. From the 19 councils that provided figures, a total of 664 staff were reported as employed in 2017/18. The totals for the previous four years were 625 (2013/14) (one council, of the 19, listed 57 staff for all the other years but did not have a figure available for 2013/14), then 673 (2014/15), 676 (2015/16) and 661 (2016/17).

Changes to services will have impacted on some reductions or increases. Also, not all made it clear whether or not they were reporting full time equivalent (FTE) figures. Most councils reported figures to be consistent or slightly reducing and the figures for 2017/18 are not for the full year. Some saw increases (e.g. Fife from 44 to 54 and Dundee 87 to 97). Those with reductions included East Ayrshire, dropping from 31 for the first three years to 23 for the last two, and Perth & Kinross (33 to 22) and Shetland (35 to 25).

On expenditure, figures from 23 councils saw spending of £26.15m in 2013/14 drop to £25.9m in 2016/17. Most of this spending was on council services but some councils provided figures for expenditure on their contracted/ commissioned services from housing associations. (e.g. Aberdeen City, Scottish Borders, Western Isles). Edinburgh's figure was for staffing, operational and contract costs. Some noted changes due to a reduction in housing support income and some noted figures did not include e.g. repairs costs. Noticeable rather than incremental change in spending included Glasgow, where expenditure fell from £5.6m to £3m between 2013/14 and 2016/17 (and has been cut to zero now); Scottish Borders, down from £693k in 2013/14 to £497k in 2016/17; and Stirling, down from £157k to £86k, while Aberdeenshire increased from £2m to £4.3m, although staff numbers there went down slightly, 81 to 77. East Ayrshire spending went down from £169k to £100k (staff from 31 to 23) and East Dunbartonshire figures fell from £202k to £43k.



Only eleven councils provided any figures for future budgets for sheltered housing and of those, some provided only one or two years ahead. However, they largely said figures were expected to stay at around current levels. The total budgeted figure for next year from them was £11,924,208, in comparison for the same eleven for 2016/17 (2017/18 did not include full year) of £11,809,362.

We asked about whether those employed on sheltered housing contracts were receiving the Scottish Living Wage. Some councils said that contracts had been agreed prior to councils paying the LW to their own staff and/or that they predated the Fair Working Practices standard clause in Scottish Government guidance. Most said the information was not held. Western Isles Council said that commissioned services have been contacted "and we have been given assurances that they are adhering to the Living Wage." A couple said they sought to have the Living Wage paid, with one referring to a clause that a funding increase was to be used to pay the Living Wage to care and support staff. Two or three referred to using the standard clause for new contracts, including Aberdeen City who said they had just retendered using this. A couple of councils quoted wording from the guidance (disputed by UNISON, sister trade unions and many others) that it is not possible to make payment of the Living Wage a mandatory requirement.



Background and FOI responses

We note that the Scottish Federation of Housing Associations (SFHA) is an accredited Living Wage employer, along with a good number of housing associations but it is essential to have more sign up.

As referred to above, in Glasgow, all sheltered housing funding has been cut by the Glasgow Health and Social Care Partnership, which decided in late 2016 to end it all by December 2017, following previous large cuts. A spokesperson told the Daily Record in March 2017 that this was “a direct consequence of the huge pressure on public sector budgets.”³

In January, The Herald⁴ reported that the decision to save £3m would see traditional sheltered housing wardens withdrawn from 2,600 people across the city. Those who need a social care package would still receive that, but warden services provided by a range of housing associations across the city seem set to go unless the landlords decide to fund them through raising rent or find some other way.

The Herald said that Glasgow Housing Association will use a telephone service with an ‘Alertacall OKEachDay’ button on tenants’ phones. “Where traditionally wardens in sheltered housing would knock on the door and check all is well and maybe ask their residents whether they had taken their medication, now those same tenants in Glasgow Housing Association (GHA) complexes are only likely to get such a visit if they don’t press the Alertacall “OKEachDay” button on their telephones.” If the button is not pressed each day “a relative or carer will be told, so that they can check why not. The company’s remaining wardens will be based at three hubs around the city, and can also respond.”

Columnist Stephen Naysmith commented: “Amid all the concern about the isolation of many elderly people and the health costs of loneliness, it seems somewhat reductive and possibly reckless to replace the daily checks of wardens with buttons, however friendly.”⁵

While technology and the changing needs of tenants, might lead to use of telecare and similar systems to support the work of wardens, we believe this should be introduced as planned, negotiated improvements, not because of swingeing budget cuts.

Demographic trends are obvious and increasing numbers of older people will be needing this kind of support. Public services spending plans must take the varied needs of older people into account and reports show that sheltered housing is valued, in particular because of the warden service. The Scottish Government’s 2008 Review of Sheltered Housing in Scotland, said that reductions in warden services were “deeply unpopular”. One of the concluding observations was: “It is also very clear that sheltered housing remains very popular with those who live in it. It is the support element that makes sheltered housing attractive, and yet it is the support element that is being eroded.”⁶

On top of overall ‘austerity cuts’ severely hitting local government in particular, there has been specific uncertainty in the last few years around funding for supported accommodation of all types, including sheltered housing, due to the UK Government welfare reform changes to housing benefit and the new universal credit. A controversial proposed local housing allowance cap which was seen as a key threat to funding was dropped late last year following lobbying by the sector. The U-turn was welcomed by the SFHA⁷, among others, although concerns remain about future arrangements, despite the UK Government saying current funding levels will be maintained. Housing benefit has been providing housing cost support for people with additional housing support needs, and it is soon to be devolved to the Scottish Government. A UK Government consultation on funding closed in January.

We asked councils about their reports on the impact of the changes. Renfrewshire was one of the few which provided an extract from a report. This noted that: “To safeguard existing provision of supported accommodation and maintain provider confidence, Renfrewshire Council/Health and Social Care Partnership will require an estimated £2.63m per annum under the devolved arrangements. Careful monitoring of the proposed resource transfer that would occur between the Department of Work and Pensions and the Scottish Government and thereafter to the council will require to be carefully monitored to assess any funding gap emerging and the potential implications this may have.” The report noted that if the amount of funding required “to support this provision is reduced, current housing providers may choose to exit the marketplace with workforce and wider financial consequences for the council/HSCP.”



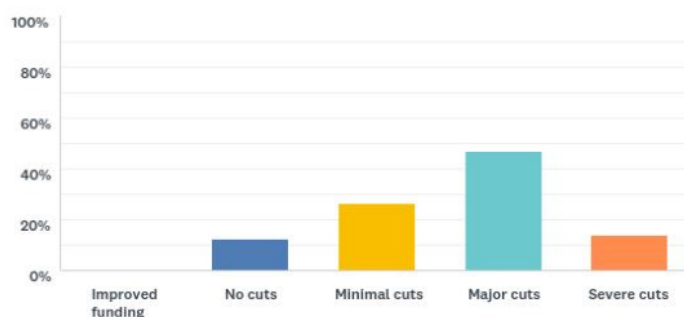
Survey responses

The members who responded to our survey came from 18 local authority areas and 89% are employed in local government, with 11% working for housing associations.

Most were sheltered housing wardens (49%) or sheltered housing officers (30%). There were some care/support workers (7%) with a small number of people in other roles, e.g. cleaner, housing officer/manager, cook.

Level of cuts

Q5 How would you describe the level of financial cuts affecting the sheltered housing complex(es) where you work?



We asked how members would describe the level of financial cuts affecting the sheltered housing complex(es) where they work. They told us that their services had been hit hard by cuts. Nearly half (47%) said there had been major cuts, with another 14% reporting severe cuts. Minimal cuts were reported by 26% and no cuts by 12%. No-one reported increased funding.

This meant many people now find themselves working largely alone. One said: "We are now lone workers & have no support of colleagues which we had before. If you are having issues with tenants & many of their families, the issues are still there and we are very vulnerable as lone workers."

Some shocking/distressing comments were made in response to this and other questions. For example, one worker said: "Elderly people are considered a burden and there is no cash available to provide care."

There have been cuts to terms and conditions for many workers, as well as reductions in hours for some. Recurring complaints included that staff are not being replaced when they leave, with valuable experience lost, and that lone working is difficult, isolating and leaves staff too stretched to spend enough time with tenants.

What the staff say:

- *Less staff on duty. Sometimes wardens have to lone work.*
- *Wardens that have retired - their jobs are not being filled. We are down 11 wardens already with no replacements.*
- *Staff shortage is a huge worry. The job is more isolating. I often have to go into situations on my own which are a health and safety risk. I am more stressed as I have no staff around to discuss work problems. Having no experienced sheltered housing managers to support and advise me is a big issue. You feel so alone as though you're your own boss. It makes you feel very vulnerable.*
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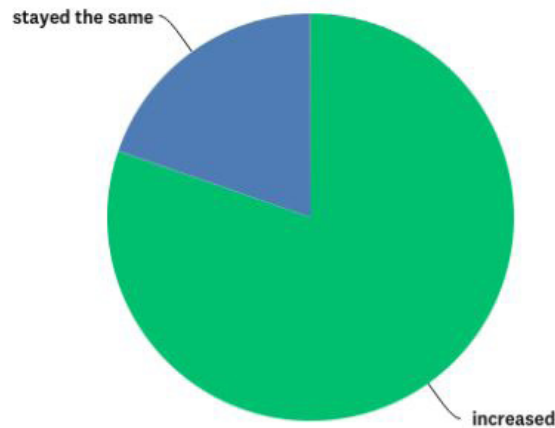


Survey responses

- *There were cuts in 2010 where many posts were cut & staff had to cover three or four complexes rather than having responsibility for one complex. These posts are now considered community sheltered housing.*
- *Some equipment that would have been available before has now to be purchased by tenants. Staff wage cuts, public holiday payments, enhancements cut.*
- *I understand that the supporting people type of funding may be stopped? This translates to 20% of my salary. I actually spend significantly more than 20% of my time supporting tenants, especially those with a diagnosis of dementia who don't have family. As I work for a housing association I'm not aware of/ feeling any other impacts of cuts.*
- *The cuts in the service are having a huge impact on service delivery. The complex where I work has not had auxiliary staff for around 2 months which is also making things a lot worse. The overall condition of the complex is very poor and I worry about infection spreading around the complex to staff and tenants who frequent the complex daily.*
- *Morale is very low with staff now. More and more staff due to the cuts and the demands being made on them are prepared to leave the job. Hence the service will decline as they lose experienced staff. This all has an effect on the service that the tenants receive.*
- *The fact that management are readily admitting that we are currently understaffed by 12.5 wardens and do not, in the current climate, intend replacing them would indicate that there is a major lack of funding available.*
- *The cuts are in the form of us having lost our team leaders and manager who only oversaw sheltered housing. We have since been left without any monitoring or supervision, with line management who are not resourced to be able to manage our service.*
- *Staff shortage and big struggle for staff cover. Sheltered schemes getting neglected. No sheltered housing managers specifically for our service. Very little, if any, training.*
- *One council care worker who said cuts had been minimal, still saw considerable problems. This person warned of the high turnover of staff and difficulties getting approval for ordering basic supplies such as paper, gloves, sick bowls and cleaning products. These were "often running out before ordering more, as per head office directives." This worker complained too about the costs of registering with the Scottish Social Services Council.*
- *"Having to be SSSC registered has increased costs and the extra training they require is an issue. The need to administer more controlled medications such as methadone is a worry. Although staffing is pretty good we still quite often work short, which is fine when needs are low but a real struggle when extra support (hoisting, stand aids, end of life care) are needed for more than one tenant."*
- *A high number of staff are having to go off sick with work related stress/depression.*
- *Witnessing home care shortages, where vulnerable individuals are throughout the night waiting up to six hours for personal care is horrific. Sheltered housing changes in regards to removal of funding for Housing Associations is putting the elderly and disabled at risk. Incorrect referrals, non-referrals due to lack of training or appropriate staff are shocking. In addition the AP1 (adult protection) regulations were meant to support older adults from harm. The truth is the resources to assist with improving lives are not there when an AP1 is in place.*

Workload

Q7 Has your workload in the last four years



Eighty per cent of members said their workload had gone up in the last four years, with 20% saying it had stayed the same.

Complaints about paperwork again featured, along with complaints about restructured services leading to overstretched staff struggling to cope with an increased workload.

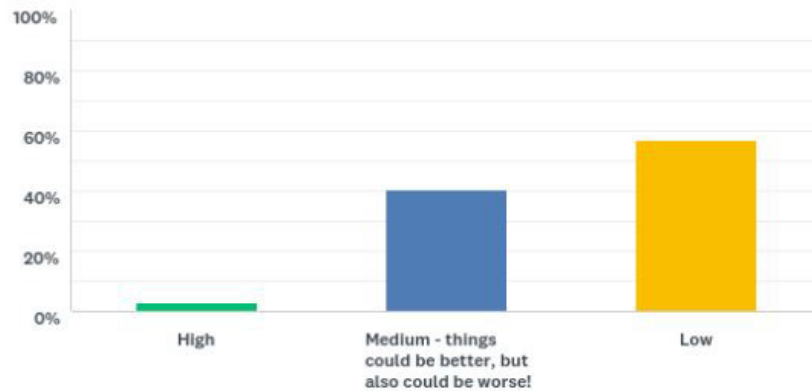
What the staff say:

- *More paperwork, computer work. We have also taken on the roles of housing officers.*
- *Short staffed. Covering more duties.*
- *Lost our managers and structure. No longer a stand alone service. Now managed by managers who are not from a sheltered housing background, and not receiving the same level of support. Also staff split up in different localities, so more isolation and having to manage ourselves. Paperwork not being checked. Training has gone by the wayside. Also staff who have left have not been replaced. We are on a skeleton service. Not enough staff around to cover. Care Inspectorate has not been involved despite being a registered service.*
- *There are increases in tasks I am not trained to complete, i.e. the secretarial work, coming to us from the main office. Also checks on the building and structure fire appliances etc, that I feel should be carried out by persons qualified in health and safety. My role was to care for people, not be busy cleaning four flights of stairs and all the landings that the cleaner did before she left and will not be replaced, the tasks being put onto the wardens' duties*
- *My workload is higher due to staff shortages, voluntary early retirement, and staff who have resigned due to the pressure they have been put under.*
- *My workload dropped by half because of the new locality boundaries put in place but has more than doubled since. Staffing levels are so low in some localities that I have been working outside of my locality to make sure elderly clients are not being neglected by the service.*
- *Increased 10 fold!*



Morale

Q6 What is morale like for you and your colleagues?



A total of 57% of members said that morale was low, unsurprising when you read the sometimes harrowing comments.

What the staff say:

- *I have been in sheltered housing over 15 years. I can see huge change in what we can offer to our sheltered housing clients as we do not have the time with extra work & tasks to be carried out*
- *Informed at a meeting in October of closures and cuts that will take effect in March 2018. Staff looking for alternative employment or taking on bank work.*
- *Very high and stressful workload. I work alone so am responsible for the support of over 50 individuals. Some have very complex needs and trying to identify, manage and document everything is difficult. Never enough hours in the day!*
- *Complexes are currently being left with one member of staff from Thursday through to Sunday and this is quite stressful, particularly for wardens lone working in larger complexes. Alternative arrangements have also been put in place so that one warden is being left with the responsibility of looking after two complexes. This is becoming more widespread and occurs, at the moment, on Saturday and Sunday. This is being done, much against the wardens' wishes as it is not in any warden's contract that they should be expected to be responsible for two complexes at any time.*
- *Our service has been dumped by the council and as staff our concerns have been ignored.*
- *Many staff are becoming increasingly disillusioned. But the staff who remain are all working very hard to do their jobs to the same high standards as before. Some staff have been off work unwell with the stress of their job. For myself, I am not feeling stressed.*
- *Lone workers. Zero support. Sometimes threatened and attacked.*
- *Staff have been messed about, left uncertain regards our future. We feel insecure and fearful about an uncertain future. We kept getting tossed over to temporary managers. Now we face yet another review.*
- *Staff shortages, taking ages to interview to fill posts.*
- *Staff getting stressed due to workload. Tenants still expect the same amount of services, including activities in the complex.*



Job cuts / hours cuts

Asked if there had been cuts to the number of sheltered housing officers (or equivalent posts), 62.% said yes, with 71% saying this was by a small amount, but more than a quarter (27%) reporting the reduction was "considerable". A total of 35% reported a reduction in the number of hours/days worked (e.g. no weekend working/shorter hours in each complex). And 41% said there had been a reduction in the number of other staff.

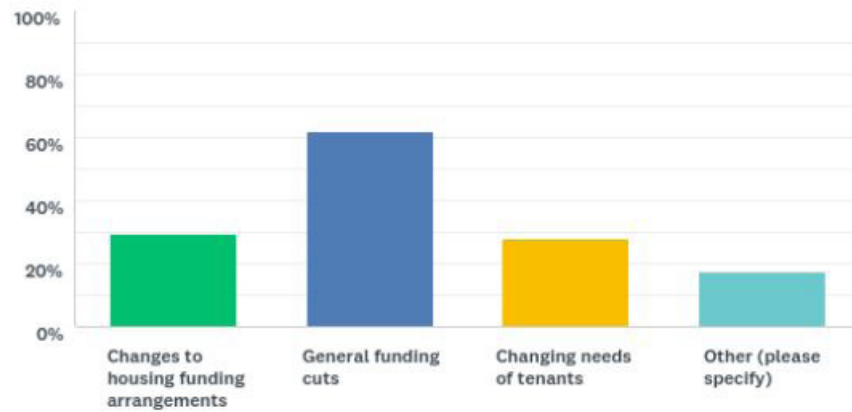
What the staff say:

- *People who have left haven't been replaced. Developments dropped to part time "concierge" with phone support rather than on site managers.*
- *Some developments have deregistered and gone to a concierge type role.*
- *From a staffing level of 70 wardens, there is a shortfall of 12.5 at present which represents almost 18%.*
- *The care of duty to our sheltered housing tenants has decreased and the amount of computer/office work increased*
- *There are approximately half of us now, compared to when I commenced working here in January 2013.*
- *All weekend nights & bank holidays removed, although there is still a demand for this service. And we are expected to collate information on contacting tenants over four days holiday.*
- *The hours have not changed, but they are always looking for people to cover shifts by moving people about the services and leaving one warden on a service which last year had three or four wardens on*
- *Changes to work patterns are confusing to tenants. No continuity of care.*
- *No sleepovers and weekend working 2008. Staff in area reduced from 22 to six and now down to four from 2010.*
- *There were eight senior wardens and there are now six. The relief pool of wardens (created primarily to assist with cover) was eight and is now four. And of the four there are two who are being utilised to basically fill full time vacancies so, at this moment in time, it is almost impossible to get any help with cover from them.*



Reason given for cuts

Q12 What reasons have been given for cuts? (tick as many as apply)



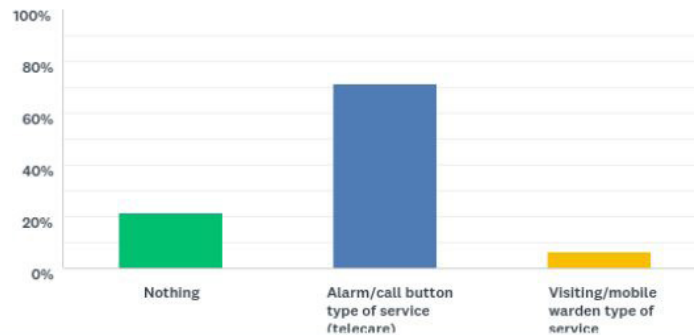
We asked what explanation had been given for cuts to staffing and services. A total of 62% said general funding cuts, with 29% saying it was due to changes in housing funding arrangements and 28% due to the changing needs of tenants.

What the staff say:

- *The company recently lost out on a big tender, however they have been grumbling about lack of resources for the last four years*
- *We have not been told anything other than management are waiting on outcomes of Local Housing Allowance figures to come through as they may have to cut funding further.*
- *All to do with money not the tenants*

Alternative provision

Q13 Has anything been offered instead of the sheltered housing warden service? (or when wardens are not on duty)



We asked what was offered instead of the warden service, or when wardens are not on duty. Telecare alarm/call button types of service were listed by 72% as the alternative provision instead of sheltered housing staff, or when staff were not on duty. But 22% said nothing was offered, with 7% saying that a visiting/mobile warden type service was operated.

What the staff say:

- *Alert service attend to emergency calls.*
- *Social care response team are available when warden service is not on duty.*
- *Community alarm.*
- *We have always been linked to telecare for all out-of-hours situations so this is not new.*
- *This is happening through the alternative arrangements. Each pair of complexes that have been "grouped" together for the weekend arrangements are in the position of one will have a warden on site and the other will be contacted remotely through the call system. This effectively means that the complex that does not have a warden on site at the weekend is not receiving the same level of service as the complex that does.*



Support services to tenants

Half our members (49%) said that the number of support services for tenants had gone down, with 51% saying they hadn't reduced.

What the staff say:

- *The number of carers has been cut. Also the Alert workers are sent to different areas. Sometimes, there are only two covering three areas, which means tenants having to wait for support a great deal longer.*
- *Support staff too tied up with other work, reducing support time.*
- *As a sheltered housing warden/officer, I feel my tenants still expect me to be the good neighbour, checking in when they are unwell, but the demands now make this very difficult. Some of my tenants have been here over 25 years & they can see a change.*
- *Social work are only dealing with critical and substantial cases*
- *Support is not as readily available, waiting times have increased.*

Social activities

Similarly, 40% said that social activities for tenants had been reduced, with 60% saying they had not been. Where they are maintained, it is clear that managers prioritise this as an important part of the service. However, with new cuts feared, that may change. Staff feel pressured when time for this is limited and yet they know how much tenants value the activities.

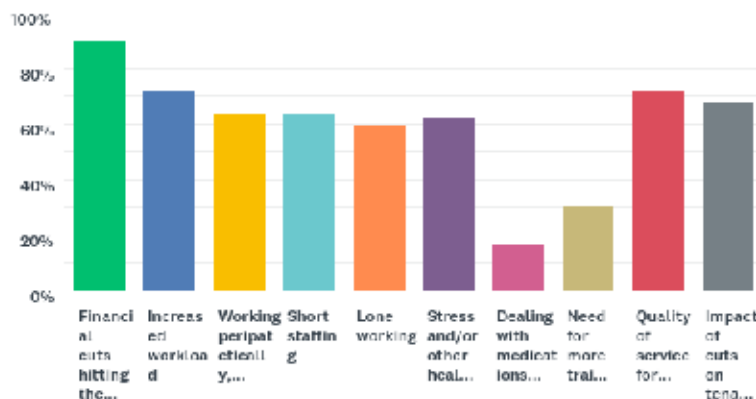
What the staff say:

- *All social activities within the complex have been lost and now tenants have to travel into the community if they want to take part but the majority have mobility difficulties and they have lost all these.*
- *Complex has no one working in the afternoons, therefore activities have been cut.*
- *Less flexible. More service led. Care used to meet the needs of the service users now the services users have to fit into the service.*
- *No budget for activities. We have to source or be inventive to provide activities.*
- *No exercise classes, no art classes, no lunch clubs etc.*
- *I give a lot of my own time to ensure that this much-valued resource doesn't reduce. Social activity and events is far too important to reduce. It can offer people a real quality of life so I wouldn't compromise on this.*
- *Activities may often have to be cancelled if only one warden is on duty as it is not possible to carry out your day to day duties and provide social activities if you are lone working.*
- *Complexes with no working wardens rarely have activities.*
- *Yes. They used to have an events person doing activities, but not anymore.*
- *No funding available and the sheltered housing officer is no longer able to attend on outings to safe guard those on a trip.*



Concerns about specific issues

Q17 In your work team/department, do you have concerns about these specific issues? as many as you think are a worry)



We listed a range of issues that we knew might be concerning people. Members were asked to tick “as many as you think are a worry”. The top concern was ‘financial cuts hitting the service in the next few years’, ticked by a massive 90%. Second and third, at 72%, was increased workload and ‘quality of service for tenants’.

Third was the impact of cuts on tenants being able to live independently, while fourth and fifth equal (64%) were ‘working between two or more sites’ and short staffing. Other concerns included stress and other health and safety issues (62%), lone working (60%), the need for training (31%) and dealing with medications (17%).

What the staff say:

- *If services are reduced some tenants may be unable to live as independently (with help) as previously and therefore may require to go into permanent care, costing local councils more money.*
- *Some staff are having counselling for stress and the others dread coming to work as they may be moved to another area that they are unfamiliar with and don't know tenants. This happens most weeks in the bigger complexes which also affects the member of staff left to look after 100 plus tenants.*
- *We are under a lot of stress and are lone workers - I used to be very confident and happy in my post but with workloads and not enough hours as we do not work as much hours as council wardens we are 9am - 1 pm daily and 9 - 2 pm on Mondays and Fridays and personally I am hardly ever finished in time working beyond my hours in my own time*
- *As savings of millions of pounds have still to be made, I can't see the working environment easing at all. Staff leaving will continue to not be replaced. Less staff will remain to do the work. The quality of current service to tenants will be difficult, if not impossible to maintain. Current staff provide a pro-active service to vulnerable clients. Time to work pro-actively may soon diminish or even disappear.*
- *Staff shortage is a huge worry. The job is more isolating. I often have to go into situations on my own which are a health and safety risk. I am more stressed as I have no staff around to discuss work problems. Having no experienced sheltered housing managers to support and advise me is a big issue. You feel so alone as though you're your own boss. It makes you feel very vulnerable.*
- *Workload has trebled over the last few years. Depending on the type of complex and age and disabilities of tenants this can have an impact on finishing the work on the deadline requested. Pay should be reviewed and reflect the work load and service we provide.*



Concerns about specific issues

- *I feel that I am making myself physically and mentally exhausted trying to maintain a high level of service for so many individuals. I constantly battle with a lack of professional recognition from others e.g visiting care staff, health professionals and particularly social care professionals who fail to recognise our role and value. I also have concerns around our allocations policy and this altering the ambience within what is supposed to be sheltered housing for older people. There is often different 'attitude' from younger people with different needs and demands. I don't believe we are doing enough to preserve the benefits of sheltered housing for those who need that shelter.*
- *I feel that staff are now being treated very unfairly and that there is a backlash for staff going to their unions. We are being made to feel like we are doing something wrong in involving our unions in our concerns for our jobs and the service.*
- *Welfare visits are an integral part of my job and they give me an opportunity to sit with the tenant and discuss their wellbeing. To do this sometimes takes a little bit of time but we are being issued with the instruction that, if lone working and struggling to give enough of our time to any tenant, that a five minute visit will have to suffice. I feel that this actually borders on neglect.*
- *I feel unsupported as a lone worker. I have been threatened with violence on more than one occasion.*
- *I basically feel that the sheltered housing service is being run into the ground.*
- *One worker's big concerns are: "That the day centre will close completely. That medication errors could prove fatal."*
- *Not sure if there will be sheltered housing in the future.*

Good local examples

We asked for examples of good practice. Most offered instead suggestions of what would be good and how to improve working conditions and the service for tenants. Some praised training they received which was of enormous help in their work: "Training. This is much appreciated within our role, as we are dealing with different support needs and age groups. meeting up in training room scenarios, learning and laughing together also helps morale and gives staff a chance to catch up with colleague in other areas."

But one comment summed up what many wardens feel that they are there for:

"The best examples are the simple ones - our knowledge of the people we are wardens for means that we can pick up on health concerns, changes in how someone is acting and do something about it."



Conclusion

UNISON argues that there are many people who should be sheltered from the storm of austerity cuts. Yet the ideology of austerity hits the most vulnerable the hardest. Our members see the effects on a daily basis and they are deeply worried. Surely our grandmothers, grandfathers and other elderly people living in sheltered housing, needing support, deserve a properly staffed and resourced service? It also makes complete financial sense to enable their independent living.

Quality sheltered housing services, as well as crucially providing dignity, support and a sense of security for tenants and their families, are truly preventative, saving money in other budgets. This was summed up by one member from a housing association, who said: "I think that the real value of sheltered housing is often not recognised. Our service is making a real difference to people's lives and helping prevent hospital admissions or a need for long term residential/nursing home care. Our outcomes can't always be measured. It can be around a sense of safety, security and the knowledge that someone can visit to resolve a minor or sometimes, a very major issue."

As columnist Stephen Naysmith said in *The Herald* (16 Jan 2018)⁸ about the situation in Glasgow referred to above: "Amid all the concern about the isolation of many elderly people and the health costs of loneliness, it seems somewhat reductive and possibly reckless to replace the daily checks of wardens with buttons, however friendly."

"It is hard to prove that sheltered housing prevents people deteriorating and needing more complex and expensive care, though many in the housing association movement believe it. But we, and Glasgow, may be about to find out."

UNISON suggests that all those currently taking decisions about public spending reflect on this and other reports in our *Damage* series, which highlight some of the very real impacts of austerity cuts.

We also suggest that all those making decisions specifically about spending on sheltered housing listen to the voices of staff in the trade unions working on the ground. Listen to what our members say about their fears for the health and wellbeing of tenants. There is a human cost that is unquantifiable if we do this badly. There is also a financial cost if these changes and cuts lead to increased hospital admissions. Giving shelter should be a quality service with a qualified, well trained workforce who are valued and listened to and looked after. Their input is key in ensuring tenants receive a high standard of service. It is clear that spending cuts are having a major detrimental impact.

One member employed by a council told us she has now left this work, explaining that the cuts are "all to do with money, not the tenants." Her role was "no longer person centred. You have no time for the tenants. It's paperwork, paperwork... The morale is really bad. Moans, moans and more moans." She didn't like to see the tenants' social activities cut, noting that staff aren't involved any more and tenants don't want to have to arrange activities by themselves. Worse, she said that it is "difficult to get referrals if you think there is a problem", for example, if you think a person has signs of dementia. She recommended that sheltered housing officers should only have one scheme to look after as it is difficult for someone dealing with two or three to do all that is required. Her closing comment was: "I loved my job and the tenants."

If employers are concerned about people leaving, they should be listening to find out why. The comments of our members provide a valuable insight into their daily work and the strain they are under. Branches can use this report to back up their local work with employers, to call for increased spending on sheltered housing and to inform suggestions for improvements, including a drive to ensure that all contractors pay the Living Wage.



Endnotes

- 1: <http://www.gov.scot/resource/doc/319074/0101916.pdf>
- 2: <http://www.gov.scot/Topics/Statistics/Browse/Housing-Regeneration/HSfS/SpecialNeeds>
- 3: <https://www.dailyrecord.co.uk/news/glasgow-city-council-scrap-funding-10077798>
- 4: http://www.heraldscotland.com/news/15829840.Elderly_residents_in_Glasgow_told_Push_button_to_say_you_are_OK_as_wardens_phased_out/
- 5: http://www.heraldscotland.com/opinion/15829641.Stephen_Naysmith_What_price_human_contact_for_the_elderly/
- 6: <http://www.gov.scot/Publications/2008/01/11131906/4>
- 7: <https://www.sfha.co.uk/news/news-category/sfha-news/news-article/uk-government-responds-to-report-on-future-funding-of-supported-housing>
- 8 http://www.heraldscotland.com/opinion/15829641.Stephen_Naysmith_What_price_human_contact_for_the_elderly/

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