

Social Housing Professionalisation Review

Topic Guide: Management

J11741

Date 8/9/23

A Introduction (3 minutes)

Introduction

Thank you for agreeing to take part in this research project that DLUHC have asked us, IFF Research, to carry out for them.

Background

In November 2020, the Government published “The Charter for Social Housing Residents: Social Housing White Paper”, committing DLUHC to hold a review of professional training and development for social housing staff. As a result, DLUHC have commissioned IFF Research to carry out research to better understand the training and development of social housing staff in customer facing roles.

Essentially, we’re seeking to understand how you develop the skills of your customer-facing staff, and encourage an ethos which results in a professional service being delivered to tenants. Where relevant we discuss professional development and training of any customer-facing sub-contractors too.

Interview

The interview will last about an hour, depending on what you have to say. Do let me know if you’re pressed for time. The discussion guide was designed for a range of audiences – there may be a few pauses while I find the right questions to ask in your situation. Please do say if you’re finding the questions difficult, or they stray into areas which you don’t know enough about to comment.

Confidentiality

IFF Research is an independent market research company, and we are members of the Market Research Society, and must follow its Code of Conduct. Anything you tell us will be treated in confidence, and none of your answers will be attributed to you personally, or to your organisation, unless you give explicit permission for us to do so. The information we collect will be used only for the purposes of this research project.

Under GDPR legislation, you have the right to have a copy of your data, change your data or withdraw from the research at any point. If you’d like to do this, please ask, or you can consult the IFF Research website, or give us a call. We will be recording the interview, just so that I don’t have to take too many notes as we go along. The recording will be stored securely, used for analysis purposes only, and not transferred outside IFF Research. **Is this OK?**

I will need you to complete a consent form – you can submit this after the interview if you haven’t already.

START RECORDING

IF ASKED: iffresearch.com/gdpr – 020 7250 3035 – IFF Research, 5th Floor, St. Magnus House, 3 Lower Thames Street, London, EC3R 6HD

Do you have any questions before we start?

B The policy and review (10 minutes)

In this interview, we'd like to talk about the Social Housing White Paper and related work on professionalisation. We'll be speaking to a variety of people about this, but for this interview we're interested in your perspective as someone with a strategic or practical role in learning and development at a social landlord. We'll be moving on to talk about your organisation's detailed approach and specific initiatives you may have developed later.

ASK STRATEGIC ROLES ONLY

B1 **So, first of all, has your organisation had any direct involvement in the Social Housing White Paper and related work so far?**

IF YES:

- In what way did you get involved?
- Were you personally involved?

ASK ALL (ALL ROLES)

B2 **First of all, in your opinion, how do you define a professional service?**

- What are the skills and behaviours needed to deliver a professional service?
- When tenants don't receive a professional service, what do you think are the most common causes of that?
- In your opinion, how important do you think providing a professional service to tenants is to your organisation?

ASK ALL (ALL ROLES)

B3 **In your view, how important are training and qualifications, relative to other factors, in ensuring your staff deliver a professional service?**

- What *are* the most important factors?

C Your organisation's approach (13 minutes)

I'd now just like to ask a bit about your organisation's approach to professional training and development for customer-facing staff.

ASK ALL (L&D, MANAGEMENT AND STRATEGIC ROLES)

C1 **To what extent is training delivered in response to staff requesting training, and to what extent is it delivered for a particular role?**

- To what extent do you provide CPD or refresher training to existing members of staff?
- Do your customer-facing staff often attend events or conferences?

ASK ALL (L&D AND STRATEGIC ROLES)

C2 **To what extent do you use external providers in your training offer? Why?**

ASK ALL (L&D AND STRATEGIC ROLES)

C3 **Do you fund any professional qualifications for staff?**

- What is the process for this? (*Prompt: do staff apply directly, is this managed by HR?*)
- Are there any criteria within this? (*Prompt: do staff have to be there a certain period, is there a certain amount of time staff have to remain within the organisation*)

ASK ALL (L&D AND MANAGEMENT ROLES)

C4 How do you keep track of who has what qualifications, skills and training?

- *(Prompts: staff training/skills log, line manager involvement, appraisal)*
- To what extent are plans for training and development specific to roles or stages in a career path, or specific to individual members of staff?

ASK ALL (L&D AND STRATEGIC ROLES)

C5 And thinking generally, how does the organisation make decisions about qualifications, skills and training for customer-facing staff?

- What sources of information do you rely on for these decisions?
- How much are those decisions influenced by residents?
 - How does that happen? *(Prompts: tenant scrutiny panels, customer satisfaction feedback)*
 - In what way do you think this can be done better?
- Is reflective practice used to review how training and qualification supports staff in the work they do?
- How do your organisational values / vision feed into the delivery of training, or influence of external learning programmes?

IF HAS SUBCONTRACTORS (SEE SURVEY) (ALL ROLES)

C6 How do you seek to influence qualifications, skills and training among sub-contractors?

- How successful is this?

IF LESS INFLUENCE

- Why is that? What makes this difficult?

ASK ALL (HR AND MANAGEMENT ROLES)

C7 How are staff supported in times of stress, or when dealing with difficult situations?

(Prompts: dealing with customers in difficult situations – domestic abuse, financial difficulties, mental health)

- Do you have a scheme to provide informal peer-to-peer support, or mentoring?
- In what ways are staff supported? *(prompts: e.g. counselling)*

ASK ALL (STRATEGIC AND L&D ROLES)

C8 How are you changing your approach in light of the Social Housing White Paper recommendations?

- What were you doing before?
- What is different about what you're going to do now?
- What are your main priorities to get right?

D Support from outside (8 minutes)

Now I'd like to move on to talk a bit more about the support you receive externally.

ASK ALL (L&D AND MANAGEMENT ROLES)

D1 **How aware are you of qualifications and training courses available that may be relevant to customer-facing staff?**

(prompts: CIH, HQN, Apprenticeships)

- How do you know about these?

IF LESS AWARE:

- What would make finding out about the available qualifications and training courses easier?

ASK ALL (L&D, STRATEGIC, MANAGEMENT ROLES)

D2 **Do external qualifications and accreditations available meet the needs of your customer-facing staff?**

- Why / why not?
- Are these specific enough to assist all types of social housing customer-facing staff?
- What other qualifications and accreditations do you think would support the professionalisation of your workforce?

ASK ALL (L&D, MANAGEMENT ROLES)

D3 **Do the external training providers available meet your needs?**

- Why / why not?
- Are there any particular areas where training providers could improve?

E Monitoring and reporting (8 minutes)

Now I'd like to talk a bit about how external qualifications and training are monitored and reported.

ASK ALL (STRATEGIC, HR AND MANAGEMENT ROLES)

E1 **How do you tell if tenants are receiving a professional service?**

- How do you monitor the service your staff are delivering? (e.g., KPIs, discussions at the board)
- Do you proactively ask residents about this?
- In what way do you gain customer feedback? *(prompts: resident scrutiny panels, customer satisfaction surveys/consultations)*
- Do you use external agencies to gain this feedback?
- Do you share information on performance in this area with tenants?

ASK ALL (STRATEGIC, HR AND MANAGEMENT ROLES)

E2 **Do you gather feedback from customer-facing staff?**

- In what way do you gather this feedback?

ASK ALL (STRATEGIC AND MANAGEMENT ROLES)

E3 **Do you gather feedback from other partners / stakeholders (e.g. police / mental health services)?**

- In what way do you gather this feedback?

IF HAS SUBCONTRACTORS (STRATEGIC AND MANAGEMENT ROLES)

E4 **How about when those delivering the service are subcontractors?**

- In what way do you gain feedback about subcontractors?
 - *Prompts: tenant feedback, staff working directly with subcontractors, contract management*
- Is this used effectively to influence re-procurement of subcontractors?

F Recruitment and Retention (10 minutes)

Now I'd like to talk a bit about the way your organisation recruits customer facing staff and its approach to retention of staff.

ASK ALL (HR, MANAGEMENT ROLES)

F1 **What strategy do you have in place to recruit appropriately qualified customer-facing staff?**

- Does this differ within different customer facing roles?
- How does EDI recruitment influence this strategy?

ASK ALL (HR, MANAGEMENT ROLES)

F2 **How easy or difficult is it for you to recruit staff with the skills you need for them to treat tenants professionally?**

- Are there any particular roles where this is challenging?
 - Why is this?

ASK ALL (HR, MANAGEMENT ROLES)

F3 **How do you know if someone has the right attitude for the role?**

- What kinds of behaviours do you look for?

ASK ALL (HR, MANAGEMENT ROLES)

F4 **Is it important for staff to have accredited training / qualifications ahead of recruitment?**

- Why is this?

IF NO

- What in your opinion is important?

ASK ALL (HR, MANAGEMENT ROLES)

F5 **What induction process do you have in place for new customer-facing employees?**

- How is professionalism embedded within this?

ASK ALL (HR, MANAGEMENT, STRATEGIC ROLES)

F6 **What strategy do you have in place to retain qualified staff?**

- Prompt: Recoupment of costs through external qualification scheme – many organisations stipulate that staff members have to stay within the organisation for a stated number of time before leaving or they have to partly/fully pay for the course the organisation sponsored.

ASK ALL (ALL ROLES)

F7 **Does the increased emphasis on professionalisation have any additional benefits for the organisation as a whole? (e.g. recruitment / retention – but we wouldn't push them to that idea - we're trying not to be too leading here)**

- What kinds of benefits do you believe this will bring?
- Why do you think this?

ASK ALL (HR ROLES)

F8 **Roughly what percentage of your workforce are tenants?**

- What strategy do you have in place to encourage tenants to join the workforce?
 - Prompts: volunteering opportunities, apprenticeship schemes for tenants

G Looking forward (10 minutes)

Now I'd like to talk a bit about the future in terms of professional development and training for customer-facing staff.

ASK ALL (ALL ROLES)

G1 **What are the barriers for improving the skills of customer facing staff? (e.g. time / funding – but we wouldn't push them to that idea - we're trying not to be too leading here)**

- Has this changed over time?
 - What do you think is influencing this?

ASK ALL (STRATEGIC, L&D ROLES)

G2 **To what extent is the amount you're spending on external qualifications and training changing over time?**

- How does it compare with other priorities at the moment, for your organisation?
- What takes precedence?

ASK ALL (STRATEGIC, L&D, MANAGEMENT ROLES)

G3 **Are your priorities for qualifications, training and skills changing?**

- In what way are these changing?
- What's causing this change in priorities?

ASK ALL (ALL ROLES)

G4 **What, in your view, do you think the government can do to support professionalism within housing?**

- Should there be standardised qualifications across the sector?
- Should qualifications be legally required for specific roles?
- Professional accreditation?
- Continuous Professional Development schemes?
- Promotion of the industry as a career?

H Thank and Close (2 minutes)

ASK ALL (ALL ROLES)

H1 **And is there anything else related to what we have been talking about today that you'd like to add?**

Before you go, just for the recording, I need to state that this interview has been carried out under IFF instructions and within the rules of the MRS Code of Conduct.

On behalf of the team at IFF Research and DLUHC, thank you very much for taking the time to help us with our research. If you haven't yet sent us the consent form, please do send it over by email after the interview.