



Quick guide to effective
**joint working between
housing and support teams**

Effective joint working between housing and support teams

Effective joint working builds on a shared commitment to the goals of Housing First, along with an understanding of roles and responsibilities based on discussion.

Compare your roles

Don't assume that your counterpart understands your job. Take the time to compare roles: caseloads, objectives, working hours, organisational priorities etc. There are often significant differences between operational roles in a Housing First partnership.

For example, a Housing Officer might be responsible for housing management across a patch of 300 units based on policies and procedures, while a Housing First Support Worker has no more than 7 clients and will be highly creative and flexible to support those people. Housing Officers have a wider responsibility for neighbours and community cohesion, while Support Workers are focused intensively on the needs of their individual tenants. These differences should be discussed, as inevitably they will shape each person's contribution to the partnership.

Language and practice

Housing providers are more likely to use corporate language e.g. customers, revenue, units. Support providers are more likely to use person-centred language e.g. people, trauma, safety. Look out for any differences that are getting in the way of effective communication and raise them with your counterpart.

Housing Officers might need to avoid terms like 'the homeless' and 'drug users' that focus on a problem rather than the individual (instead using 'people who are homeless', 'people who use drugs'). Support Workers might need help to understand the legal or regulatory requirements of housing management roles that might affect the scope for creativity and flexibility.

Talk about timescales

Where a housing provider might work to timescales of weeks and months, Housing First teams are often looking at hours and days. For tenants with less developed coping mechanisms whose lives are chaotic, problems can escalate rapidly. Housing First is a highly responsive service, with staff who will react quickly to address problems and protect the tenancy. This can create tension with Housing teams whose organisations are more likely to have bureaucratic processes and fixed procedures. It's worth acknowledging these differences in team culture and capacity from the outset, exploring how to maximise flexibility and responsiveness should a problem arise.

Schedule regular communication

Some Housing First partnerships have set a performance indicator e.g. weekly contact by the Support Worker to the Housing Officer. In the early stages of a tenancy, or if there are risks arising in a tenancy, frequent check-ins and active joint working can make all the difference in helping someone to keep their home.

Read the Service Level Agreement (SLA)

Your organisations should have a signed SLA that sets out the roles of each partner in the Housing First scheme. Read this document to ensure your expectations of each other are in line with the SLA and your wider organisations.

Identify a single point of contact in management

If it's not clear from the SLA, ask your counterpart who is responsible for Housing First at a management level and get their contact details. You need to know who to contact if your counterpart is absent. If you are experiencing problems in joint working and need to escalate an issue, speak with the Housing First lead in your management team first.

Working with people in Housing First tenancies

Where possible, joint visits between Housing Officers and Support Workers are a good idea so that the tenant knows who represents their landlord and that there's someone they can contact. While some people might prefer most contact to be via the Support Worker, others will choose to keep in touch with the Housing Officer directly and feel able to take on a more active role in managing their tenancy. Housing Officers and Support Workers should keep in touch with each other about the best way to contact the tenant, enabling them to choose how they want to engage, and allowing for this to change over time.

Set aside preconceptions about tenants

People moving into Housing First tenancies do not have to prove that they are 'tenancy ready', and in many cases their history and current situation mean they are far from meeting 'tenancy ready' assessments from housing providers. Yet Housing First has high rates of tenancy sustainment and issues such as ASB are comparable with tenants who are 'ready'. The success of Housing First is in setting aside standard expectations and working with the person where they are, taking a strengths-based approach and providing intensive support to head off problems. This might be a new way of working for Housing Officers, and Support Workers need to support their counterparts to understand this different way of working e.g. identifying solutions in partnership and actively recognising tenants' strengths and successes. Joint working should still happen when things are going well.

Set aside preconceptions about landlords

Social landlords are aiming to achieve stable, successful tenancies in neighbourhoods where people want to live. Housing Officers have valuable local knowledge and experience of resolving a wide range of issues with tenants. Support Workers can benefit from this expertise in supporting Housing First tenancies, seeing the strengths of the housing management function in helping to overcome challenges and achieve the shared goal of seeing people settled in their homes.

Joint working in practice

The delivery model for Housing First will be tailored by the housing and support providers, depending on how teams are structured, number of units, how stock is allocated etc. There should be a Service Level Agreement that clearly sets out who will do what at each stage, so the various teams understand their role in making Housing First a success.

Here are some examples of what joint working looks like at different stages of the process, based on conversations with Housing Associations, ALMOs and support providers:

1. The allocations team identifies upcoming voids suitable for Housing First, with neighbourhood teams sharing local intelligence about any issues that could affect that property e.g. a history of ASB or a neighbour who complains a lot. Information about voids is shared with the support provider, and there is joint working to arrange viewings and agree a timescale for decisions. The support provider confirms if there's no match with a Housing First tenant so the property can be returned for other allocations.
2. The lettings team works with the support worker to plan the sign-up. There is regular communication about any delays due to repairs. The sign-up is jointly with the tenant, support provider and housing officer. It's more flexible than usual so there is extra time for the tenant to read and sign papers e.g. over a couple of meetings instead of doing everything at once.
3. The neighbourhood team remains in close contact with the support worker, planning joint visits and sharing information about any concerns with the tenancy (whether from the housing provider or from the tenant).
4. If a problem arises, for example the tenant is being cuckooed, the housing officer and support worker work together to find solutions. This might include attending multi-agency meetings e.g. with police and social services, and working jointly with the allocations team to arrange a transfer to a different location.
5. The housing officer and support worker come up with ideas together to help the tenant settle and become connected to their new community. The housing officer shares information about how to get involved in the landlord's community initiatives e.g. training workshops, digital inclusion support, volunteering and residents' meetings.
6. In some cases, the tenant reaches the point of needing less contact from the support worker as their independence grows. In this case, the support worker lets the housing officer know that they are stepping back. Joint communication remains open so that the tenant can increase their support contact again in future, and the housing officer can raise any concerns about the tenancy.



What we do

Homeless Link is the national membership charity for frontline homelessness services. We work to improve services through research, guidance and learning, and campaign for policy change that will ensure everyone has a place to call home and the support they need to keep it.

Let's end homelessness together

Homeless Link
Minories House, 2-5 Minories
London EC3N 1BJ

020 7840 4430

www.homeless.org.uk

Twitter: @Homelesslink

Facebook: www.facebook.com/homelesslink