



Homeless Link

# Housing First Toolkit

Inception to sustainability



# Introduction and Overview

This toolkit has been created with an aim of providing information for those looking to implement and deliver Housing First at a local or regional level. It has been produced by organisations involved in the evaluation of the Housing First pilot programme in England, funded by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) and draws upon the specialist knowledge of Homeless Link and I-SPHERE (Heriot-Watt University). It is divided into two main component parts:

**Part One - Mobilising: from planning to early implementation**

**Part Two - Delivery: from implementation to sustainability**

The information provided in this toolkit is based on experience and practice observed through the evaluation, as well as from other sources. All research and resources referenced can be found on the **Homeless Link Website**.



## 1 The guiding principles of Housing First

The name Housing First can be misleading and is often misunderstood. While it can sometimes look like other housing led approaches and embodies good practice seen across a range of services, Housing First is a specific model evidenced to be highly effective at ending homelessness for people with multiple and complex needs. Housing First services are defined through their adherence to an internationally recognised set of principles and require change in the attitude, culture and approach of stakeholders to ensure they are delivered effectively and are sustainable. These principles are summarised as **The Housing First Principles**.

Services with high fidelity to the principles achieve better outcomes<sup>1</sup> for those they support, which also ensures that resources are used effectively. The key principles were launched in England in 2016 and are now accompanied by more detailed guidance about what they mean in practice.<sup>2</sup>

**In summary, Housing First should:**

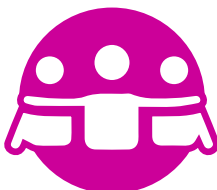
- be provided to those with complex needs and histories of homelessness, or preventively with those who may experience or would be at significant risk of experiencing repeat homelessness in the future;
- provide independent and secure housing to people holding their own tenancy;
- provide intensive and flexible support through small caseloads of five to seven people.

## Summary of the Housing First Principles



### Principle 1: People have a right to a home

- Housing First prioritises access to housing as quickly as possible;
- Eligibility for housing is not contingent on any conditions but willingness to maintain a tenancy;
- The housing provided is based on suitability (stability, quality, choice, affordability, community integration) not housing type;
- The individual will not lose their housing if they disengage or no longer require support;
- The individual will be given their own tenancy agreement.



### Principle 2: Flexible support is provided for as long as it is needed

- Providers commit to long-term support with no fixed end date - recovery takes time and varies individually;
- The service is designed for flexibility of support with procedures in place for high/low intensity support provision and for cases that are 'dormant';
- Support is provided for individuals to transition away from Housing First if a positive choice;
- The support links with relevant services across sectors to meet the full range of user needs;
- There are clear pathways into and out of Housing First services.



### Principle 3: Housing and support are separated

- Support is available to help maintain tenancies and address needs;
- Housing is not conditional on the individual engaging with support;
- The choices made about their support do not affect people's housing;
- The offer of support stays with the person - if the tenancy fails, the individual is supported to acquire and maintain a new home.



#### **Principle 4: Individuals have choice and control**

- Individuals can choose the type and location of their housing within reason;
- They have the choice, where possible, about where they live;
- They have the option not to engage with other services if there is regular contact with the Housing First team;
- Individuals choose what, where, when and how support is provided by Housing First;
- They are supported through person-centred planning and can shape the support received.



#### **Principle 5: An active engagement approach is used**

- Staff are responsible for proactively engaging and making the service fit the individual;
- Small caseloads allow staff to be persistent and proactive, especially if engagement is low;
- Support is provided for as long as each participant requires it;
- The team continues to engage and support the individual if they lose or leave their home.



#### **Principle 6: The service is based on people's strengths, goals and aspirations**

- Services are underpinned by a philosophy that there is always a possibility for positive change and improved health and wellbeing, relationships and wider integration;
- Individuals are supported to identify their strengths and goals and develop the knowledge and skills they need to achieve them;
- Individuals are supported to develop increased self-esteem, self-worth and confidence, and to integrate into their local community.



### **Principle 7: A harm reduction approach is used**

- People are supported holistically;
- Staff support those using substances to reduce immediate and ongoing harm;
- Staff aim to support individuals who self-harm to undertake practices which minimise risk;
- Staff aim to support individuals to undertake practices that reduce harm and promote recovery in other areas of physical and mental health and wellbeing.

## **The operational ingredients of Housing First**

Whilst Housing First services are defined by the key principles, there can be many operational differences in design and delivery. These include whether the housing is sourced from the private, social or public markets and the structure of the support team (which is usually commissioned out). Housing First has two internationally recognised support team structures: Intensive Case Management (ICM) and Assertive Community Treatment (ACT).

- **Intensive Case Management** usually sees a lead agency holding the contract for Housing First support. Case-managing support workers provide intensive and holistic support and act as the broker of services.
- **Assertive Community Treatment** teams are comprised of professionals from a range of sectors which function as one multi-disciplinary Housing First team. They are often seen in places where wider health and social care support is unavailable or difficult to access.

Almost all Housing First services in England are delivered through Intensive Case Management. However successful access to wider public services varies and depends in part on the relationships and partnerships in place.<sup>3</sup> There are a few examples in which specialised roles are recruited or seconded into the Housing First service which can help to improve pathways into services.

## The picture of Housing First in England

Housing First has been commissioned by local authorities in England since 2010, usually to meet an identified gap in homelessness service provision for those with very high and complex needs. These services are usually delivered across a single local authority area, are small scale in terms of the number of people served (although many scale up over time), and are delivered with local partners coming together, and working flexibly, to make them effective. The Picture of Housing First research in 2020 showed that there were 105 active services, supporting 1,995 individuals at any one time.<sup>4</sup>

An early evaluation of nine pilots in England found that Housing First is effective in an English context.<sup>5</sup> In 2018, research was published about the implementation of Housing First in England and included in-depth case studies of five different services.<sup>6</sup>

In the autumn of 2017, the Government announced significant investment to test the delivery of Housing First at scale, and the regional pilot programme was established. This has presented a rich opportunity to understand how Housing First can be delivered at a regional level, across multiple local authority areas, and to a significant number of people.

## Overview of the pilot programme

Early planning for a pilot programme was based on a study considering the feasibility of implementing Housing First at a Combined Authority level across the Liverpool City Region.<sup>7</sup> Following submission of initial implementation plans, funding was allocated in 2018 to three devolved regional authorities; Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA), Liverpool City Region Combined Authority (LCRCA) and West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA). Together these encompass 23 individual local authority areas. As of the end of December 2022, over 1,000 individuals experiencing homeless and multiple and complex needs had been recruited into and housed by the programme.

The programme is being evaluated by a consortium of research organisations and incorporates a number of strands. These include:

- measuring and capturing the outcomes for individuals supported;
- the analysis of the financial costs and the benefits resulting, including estimating potential savings to the public purse, and;
- an evaluation of the process of implementation and delivery to understand more about how the services operate, how they are experienced by individuals, and their adherence to the key Housing First principles.



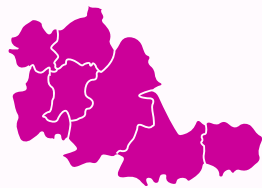
The pilot programme is overseen and monitored by DLUHC Programme and Evaluation teams and since March 2021, is supported by the Rough Sleeper Initiative team.

Information and publications related to the pilots can be found at: [homeless.org.uk/knowledge-hub/regional-housing-first-pilots](https://homeless.org.uk/knowledge-hub/regional-housing-first-pilots)

## The regional pilots

Whilst all areas are committed to delivering high-fidelity Housing First, each has developed a different model.

	Greater Manchester	Liverpool City Region	West Midlands
Commissioning	CA initially commissioned one consortium of eight organisations branded as Greater Manchester Housing First. Lead provider (Great Places) has central programme management team. Additional partners commissioned in subsequent years.	CA are delivering in-house following recruitment of service delivery teams.	Funding divided between LAs with Birmingham City Council (BCC) being accountable body. Commissioning staggered across the CA through a common tendering process. Mix of in-house and commissioned providers.
Management and control	Central team responsible for sub-contracting to partners, programme oversight and reporting to the CA.	CA have a central management team who oversee service delivery and provide consistency and fidelity to the principles through a Quality Assurance framework.	BCC overall accountability to DLUHC. Each LA monitors and reports on local progress.
Delivery model	Region divided into four delivery zones each with a lead delivery partner.	Locality model with six in-house delivery teams supported by a central team.	Locally commissioned service in each LA working independently of one another.
Housing supply	Primarily social housing with some privately rented properties.	Primarily social housing (CA has above national average share of socially rented properties).	Combination of social and private rented sector. In Birmingham, the largest LA has provided over 80% of required properties.

	Greater Manchester	Liverpool City Region	West Midlands
<b>Lived experience involvement</b>	Through a co-production group for development and ongoing input.	Through lived-experience group for research, pilot design and development, and recruitment.	An existing group was involved in the early stages of design and implementation.
<b>Cross-region support delivery</b>	Universal job descriptions, standardised pay rates and common team structures in each zone. Pan-region dual diagnosis workers recruited.	Staff employed through the CA 2.5 FTE pan-region psychologists recruited by CA as part of the pilot team. Central Lettings Team who work with housing providers and support delivery teams in preventing tenancy failure.	Birmingham Voluntary Service Council (BVSC) commissioned for the first two years to support commonality - job descriptions, training and support.
<b>Local authorities covered</b>	<p>The 10 authorities of:</p>  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Manchester,</li> <li>• Bolton,</li> <li>• Bury,</li> <li>• Rochdale,</li> <li>• Stockport,</li> <li>• Oldham,</li> <li>• Tameside,</li> <li>• Salford,</li> <li>• Trafford, and</li> <li>• Wigan.</li> </ul>	<p>The six authorities of:</p>  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Liverpool,</li> <li>• Sefton,</li> <li>• St Helens,</li> <li>• Wirral,</li> <li>• Halton, and</li> <li>• Knowsley.</li> </ul>	<p>The seven authorities of:</p>  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Birmingham,</li> <li>• Coventry,</li> <li>• Dudley,</li> <li>• Sandwell,</li> <li>• Solihull,</li> <li>• Walsall and</li> <li>• Wolverhampton</li> </ul>

This toolkit was originally published in 2018 and focussed on the mobilisation period of a Housing First. As the pilots have continued, further learning has been captured, leading to this updated version (2023) that now includes information and advice on delivering a Housing First service.



# Toolkit structure

The toolkit is structured as follows:

## Part one, 'Mobilising Housing First', which covers:

- **Section 2:** Planning Housing First – establishing a vision for Housing First in your area; determining who should be involved; assessing need and identifying funding; developing your plan.
- **Section 3:** Commissioning Housing First support – the commissioning process; developing service specifications; monitoring progress.
- **Section 4:** Mobilising Housing First – considering the time required; the staff required, their recruitment and support; subcontracting and external service providers; developing partnerships; access to housing.
- **Section 5:** Housing First early delivery – service entry: eligibility criteria.

## Part two, 'Delivering Housing First', which covers:

- **Section 6:** The support journey – delivering support from referral to community integration.
- **Section 7:** The Housing First team – staff support, training and retention; managing changes.
- **Section 8:** The housing in Housing First – sourcing housing; transferring property; managing partnerships; dealing with challenges; developing relationships between support providers and housing management teams.
- **Section 9:** Working with others – recognising the complexity of need; developing cross-sector partnerships; delivering a multi-agency approach.
- **Section 10:** Beyond delivery – moving beyond a pilot; embedding a culture of learning.



# Part One

Mobilising Housing First

# Mobilising Housing First

The first part of the toolkit shares good practice in terms of commissioning and mobilising Housing First. It is structured as follows:

- **Section 2:** A vision for Housing First
- **Section 3:** Commissioning Housing First support
- **Section 4:** Developing partnerships
- **Section 5:** Starting delivery of Housing First

## 2 A vision for housing first

From the outset, it is important to determine a vision for the role and scale of Housing First locally. Although this will depend on the level and nature of demand and resources available, which may change over time, setting a clear vision will help to engage stakeholders in the development process. Consider things like how Housing First provision will sit alongside other services and whether it will be scaled up in the future.

Reviewing the effectiveness of existing support for different cohorts of people can inform considerations about the level of change required. For example, Housing First may be established to complement other services available, or the plan may be to implement wider systems change or service transformation where this includes transitioning existing temporary supported housing schemes to Housing First and other housing-led approaches. Whilst there is no evidence of a local area having done this in England, this is the approach adopted in Finland and promoted through the Rapid Rehousing Transition Plans in Scotland.

It is important to consider at a systems level, how Housing First will align with other programmes and initiatives, and where it may be helpful to integrate resources or strategies. Consider how Housing First fits within local housing and homelessness strategies and any other relevant local strategic objectives (e.g. health, social care, criminal justice), and the nature, capacity, capability and service characteristics of local specialist provision.



### Top Tip:

**Partnership is key at both strategic and operational levels**

You can't do this on your own. Take time to engage senior staff in the right organisations early, ideally building on pre-existing positive working relationships or establishing new relationships where necessary. Although this may take time, it will allow you to harness their experience and ideas, reduce anxiety in the future and foster cross-agency commitment.

## Who to involve

Coordinating a group of key stakeholders from the start can strengthen planning and mobilisation. Involving senior colleagues across organisations will assist in both the strategic planning of Housing First and in overcoming any operational issues that arise in the future. Although it is easier to engage senior stakeholders when homelessness is a political priority, the potential outcomes of Housing First often align with strategic priorities across sectors. Identify these when engaging stakeholders.

It can also be incredibly useful to involve people with lived experience from the beginning. Their insights and experiences of existing service provision brings valuable information to the planning stage. This must be done meaningfully and in a way which enables people to contribute effectively.



### Example from the pilots: lived experience group input

Each of the pilots involved individuals with lived experience in their development processes, with one featuring a group of 12 to 15 individuals with a dedicated facilitator. The group met monthly having been formed as part of a previous National Lottery funded project and involved with the pilot from the outset. Specific lived experience activities to support the pilot included:

- Developing the pilot – the group were consulted throughout the process, including specific consultations on potential eligibility criteria, how best to introduce the service to potential participants, and how best to ensure sustained participation and that outcomes are achieved.
- Staff recruitment – the group were directly involved in the recruitment process for the pilot’s support workers, including contributing to the design of job specifications (i.e. specifying that formal educational qualifications were less important; ensuring that individuals with lived experience could be considered for posts) and in the selection process itself. The group designed and delivered a discrete element of the selection process, which comprised a ‘speed dating’ approach to test applicants’ values and attitudes.
- Service commissioning – the group were involved in the commissioning of the pilot’s psychology service, where they contributed to the appraisal of the bid documents and the accompanying interview process.

In addition, the lived experience group also contributed to a review of the housing allocation process in the region, building on previous work to review the local register of social and affordable homes.

Members of the group described how they had benefited from their involvement with the pilot, seeing their role as an opportunity to 'give something back', help improve services for others, and develop new skills and experience. Importantly, they described feeling that their contributions were valued, acted upon, and that they were involved in a truly co-produced approach.

Do not assume that stakeholders involved fully understand Housing First and in particular the ways in which it differs from mainstream service responses. It is important to support others to fully understand the approach and their role in making it successful. This will also help manage expectations around the time it can take to mobilise a service, ensure there are realistic perspectives about the impact that might be seen locally and reduce any initial concerns.

It can be beneficial to involve commissioners and providers of existing services and consult Homeless Link's Housing First resources - [homeless.org.uk/areas-of-expertise/housing-first](https://homeless.org.uk/areas-of-expertise/housing-first).

This can help raise awareness of the approach and key principles whilst offering an external perspective on delivery and learning.



## Top Tip:

### Top tip: reducing concerns and barriers

Involving a broad group of stakeholders and interests from the outset can help address any concerns or perceived threats from Housing First to existing roles and practices. This can be achieved by illustrating how the service can complement existing provision, help identify shared objectives and address the common challenge of homelessness.



## Example from the pilots: gaining commitment at all levels

Each of the pilots has benefited from the active and public support of senior Combined Authority and partner staff, including Mayoral support. While this has been essential in securing wider commitment at a senior level, each of the pilots has found that additional work has been required to ensure this commitment is replicated by staff working 'at the front line'.

Commitment at this level has been best achieved by communications, group and individual briefings, and presentations which ensure partner staff have a thorough working knowledge of the Housing First approach, how the local model is intended to operate, and the shared benefits of the programme. Clarity on their role in the process, and what they can expect from Housing First, also help establish this 'operational commitment' on the ground.

### Assessing need

It is important to identify the scale of the local population to be targeted for Housing First services in your area, and their characteristics and circumstances, to establish the size and model of project required. Research indicates that the approach is most cost-effective for individuals experiencing multiple disadvantages. These are individuals with long or repeated histories of homelessness and other complex, often interconnected, needs. Individuals are likely to have had repeat contact with services who have found it difficult to engage and support them effectively.

If the vision and anticipated scale allows, avoid focussing only on those who are already known to existing homelessness services as this may exclude other groups that may benefit from this approach, such as vulnerable women. Housing First can also be a preventative measure for those who have an expected trajectory into long-term homelessness or repeat but ineffective contact with services, such as vulnerable care leavers, people in prison and individuals in high-cost care of hospital facilities.

Undertake a scoping exercise to assess the need for Housing First in the area. This may be through a formal research process or using intelligence held at a local level. Involve partners and localised intelligence systems to identify and predict the potential scale of provision and to view the complex needs cohort from multiple perspectives. Some areas use the New Directions Team assessment (also known as the chaos index) to quantifiably identify those that would be eligible for the service<sup>8</sup>, while others have developed their own criteria.



## Example from the pilots: assessing the scale and nature of need

As part of their preparation, each regional pilot drew upon existing local intelligence to undertake an assessment of need and provide an estimate of the potential demand for their services among the local population. Each area followed different approaches to preparing their estimates, which were used to inform their delivery plans.

- In one pilot, a comprehensive assessment of local need was prepared as part of an initial feasibility study into delivering Housing First at scale, which itself drew upon the local homelessness data system that holds data on homeless assessments, interventions and characteristics for individuals presenting as homeless across the region.
- In a second, each of the local authorities undertook separate scoping exercises to assess the likely demand for Housing First services. The approach to assessment varied between authorities, with some areas using the New Directions Team (NDT) assessment tool while others relied primarily on existing local intelligence.
- In the third, each local authority also produced assessments of demand, some using the NDT whilst others approximated numbers based on local intelligence (e.g. using Housing Options or other local data sources).

In practice, each of the pilots found it difficult to estimate actual demand for their services.

Finally, as potential participants should not be restricted to those already known to local agencies, initial needs assessment exercises could also be helpful in identifying candidates, to allow recruitment to the service to begin early.

### Thinking about sustainability

The aim of Housing First is to offer open-ended support for as long as it is needed to individuals who require this stability. Although current funding may be for a fixed period, providing Housing First should not be thought of as a short-term intervention regardless of the scale.

Thinking about sustainability is always important, but especially when existing funding is not guaranteed in the future. Working early on long-term planning can reduce the likelihood of a cliff edge, which evidence from the pilots confirms can be extremely detrimental to individuals being supported.

Look to embed Housing First in local strategies so that it becomes a mainstream offer to individuals who would benefit now and in the future. Consider which commissioning partners need to be involved and how funding may be pooled across authorities or sectors. Determine what evidence should be collected in order to 'make the case' for future funding for the project.

Services that do not consider sustainability may find that landlord and stakeholder engagement are affected, as well as staff turnover if contracts offered are short-term.

## Early adopter or test-and-learn projects

When developing a large-scale Housing First programme, initial small projects may be developed before the wider contract is commissioned or mobilised. These 'pilots' can provide learning to inform commissioning or roll out, including understanding any operational or systemic challenges. Starting small may help to bring people on board and identify any issues at a time when they can be more easily addressed. Strategic work needed to take Housing First to scale can be identified, including developing new partnerships or processes.

Each of the pilots had benefited to differing extents from a combination of previous exposure to Housing First services and the use of test-and-learn or early adopter approaches, as summarised in the example box below.



### Example from the pilots: using test-and-learn or early adopter approaches

Prior involvement in Housing First delivery provided important learning in two of the pilot areas and was considered by staff and stakeholders to have helped their pilots move to service delivery more rapidly. This experience included a combination of early adopter and test-and-learn projects, operating within each CA under a range of funding arrangements, the learning from which helped shape the pilot's main stage services.



- One pilot commissioned an ‘early adopter’ service in one authority area in January 2019. Delivered by an external provider, the early adopter built upon a previous service for individuals homeless and with complex needs – which included several features of the nascent Housing First service – and worked with 25 individuals. Close working between the provider and pilot staff enabled learning to inform the development of the full Housing First service, as well as establishing referral and assessment processes and working with the Department of Work and Pensions to enable flexibility in benefit payments.
- In addition, a second provider also delivered a small-scale Housing First project in one authority area, which provided learning to inform full service delivery for the pilot region.
- A second pilot was designed with an initial test-and-learn exercise prior to the launch of the wider Housing First service. Delivered using an internally recruited team of support workers, the pilot worked with a cohort of individuals for the first 12 months of operation, which provided a series of key lessons which informed plans for main stage delivery.

The Combined Authorities in these two areas benefited, with stakeholders reporting high levels of interest in the approach, on the basis of the strength of the international evidence on its effectiveness and previous experience of delivery.

## Developing your plan

Be realistic around timescales for mobilisation. If there are multiple commissioners involved, then local governance arrangements, decision making and political allegiances may delay progress. Contracting providers, especially if they then have to subcontract other partners, can also take time, as can effective staff recruitment. Depending on the scale of your planned service, and your local context and partnerships, service planning and mobilisation can take anywhere from 6 to 12 months.

Once the need has been mapped and potential scale of provision identified, develop an implementation plan setting out your proposed activities. This should include:

- an outline of the scale of the programme/project and expected timeframes for implementation including whether there will be a test and learn phase;

- expected number of beneficiaries (ensure this is profiled in line with recommended caseload sizes);
- consideration of how the project will adhere to the principles of Housing First;
- consideration of whether the scale of the project requires centralised coordination capacity;
- identification of other roles involved in operational delivery (e.g. mental health or substance misuse specialists) and an indication of whether these will be funded through the programme or enabled through strategic partnerships or secondments; and
- information about any centrally provided training and support for delivery staff, including reflective practice, to ensure consistency.

During this stage it is useful to gain commitment and clarify the roles and input of authorities, housing providers and other stakeholders. Ask internal and external stakeholders, including people with lived experience, to scrutinise the plans and draw up relevant partnership agreements.

Information about how local areas have funded Housing First and research on cost-effectiveness can be found on the Housing First England website, along with guidance for commissioners:

[homeless.org.uk/areas-of-expertise/housing-first](https://homeless.org.uk/areas-of-expertise/housing-first)

### 3 Commissioning Housing First support

The Housing First approach provides a model, proven to be effective internationally, often when other approaches have failed, with the intensity of support, the principle of individual choice and the commitment to provide ongoing support marking Housing First as different to other ‘housing-led’ initiatives. New Housing First services must establish their place within the existing local networks and interventions, working closely with partners to ensure shared understandings and procedures.

#### Being a supportive commissioner

Housing First requires strong partnership working at all levels and can be a catalyst for changing cultures of service provision. Ensure this is reflected throughout the commissioning process by being transparent about objectives and expectations. Look to establish a dynamic underpinned by trust, a curiosity of learning and collaboration rather than one that is purely transactional.

Do not expect that the necessary groundwork (strategic partnership agreements, changes to policies and procedures) will only start once the provider is in place as this will delay mobilisation. Take action to build relationships and influence partner agencies throughout the commissioning process to raise awareness and gain commitment to support the mobilisation stage.

## The commissioning process

Most authorities decide to commission out Housing First support to partner agencies who have both the experience of supporting the target participant group and the infrastructure in place to deliver the service effectively. Depending on the scale of provision, one or multiple providers may be commissioned. Putting on a market engagement event can help to ensure that plans and expectations are clearly outlined. They also provide a chance for providers to meet and network.

The Housing First pilots are providing valuable learning on service commissioning at the regional level, in contrast to experiences of commissioning smaller services at the single authority level. While the research is ongoing, commissioning at a larger scale has expanded the range of provision available, including the availability of suitable providers and suitable support workers. It has also increased the opportunity to influence change in existing networks of support to better meet individuals' needs. The pilots' approaches to engaging potential service providers is described below.





## Example from the pilots: marketing events

As part of their commissioning processes, the pilots used a range of strategies to engage with their local stakeholders, including holding market engagement and other events, alongside individual and team briefings/presentations. These were found to have a range of benefits, and were helpful in raising awareness of and building commitment to the service. As examples below describe, these events also helped promote wider partner awareness and partnership development.

A combination of group events, workshops, presentations and individual meetings were employed. Key stakeholders (commonly the local authorities, housing providers, health service representatives, probation services etc) have also been recruited to pilot steering and/or working groups, where they can have a role in pilot governance as well as contributing to service development. Despite strong political and senior-level support in most of the areas, each pilot has had to invest considerable effort in raising awareness and commitment at the operational level. In some cases, this also involved countering concerns raised about the pilots and the Housing First approach and overcoming political differences that had hindered commitment.

One important takeaway is that using a range of different communications approaches, and being persistent in delivering them, were key success factors.

The pilot experience suggests the following important considerations in delivering market events and awareness raising sessions:

- promote events well and appropriately;
- be inclusive in who is invited;
- ensure the detail of the service requirement has been established in advance;
- practice active listening, and encourage discussion and questioning;
- be clear on the next steps – what is required to bid, timetables, etc.

In areas where Housing First is perceived as a significant change to the status quo, work carefully to engage providers and bring them on board. This may include taking time to raise their awareness and confidence pre-commissioning, but also making sure that the service specification is appealing to them. Some agencies may have early concerns over, or resistance to, new Housing First services, in

some cases perceiving them as an implied criticism of their services and as a risk to their continued funding. In such cases, provide a careful and detailed explanation of the Housing First approach, emphasising how it 'fits' with existing services, and demonstrate the early successes to prove the services 'in action'.

Consider any financial or other constraints that may affect smaller providers from being involved; they can have a lot to offer but may be excluded based on financial requirements if your programme is large. Consortium arrangements may allow smaller providers to participate, but consideration should still be given to both provider capacity and their geographical coverage (the latter being less of an issue for single local authority services).

If there will be multiple tenders, ensure that there is consistency in commissioning. Create shared service specifications and bring uniformity to the pricing of contracts and salaries where possible. This will ensure that commissioning is fair and consistent but will also be beneficial to providers that may wish to bid for multiple contracts.



## Example from the pilots: service commissioning

Two of the three pilots commissioned their services externally, with the third recruiting a staffing team to deliver their services directly. In the first, commissioning took place centrally across the four defined areas within the CA, and in the second, commissioning took place at the individual local authority level, with five local authorities commissioning externally and two delivering their service in-house.

**Pilot 1** - A service specification for a single consortium model was proposed, designed by the steering group with input from a working group and a co-production group. The latter included individuals with lived experience of homelessness and emphasised the value of staff establishing positive relationships with participants and of peer support. This was followed by a market event, involving presentations from the CA and Homeless Link, which provided detail of the Housing First approach and built expectations around the model. Stakeholders felt that this helped the process of partnership development.

Five bids were received in response to the service specification and were assessed by a panel, which included individuals with lived experience who assessed the value of relationships and peer support sections of the bids, accounting for 20% of the overall score.

**Pilot 2** - The decision was taken for each local authority to commission their services individually, with a commitment to work collaboratively to establish a common approach and help ensure fidelity with the Housing First principles. A local VCSE organisation was commissioned to support the development of a common tendering process, including a service specification and a template job description for support workers. Following a series of briefings and training on the Housing First principles, it was agreed that a common support model would be followed, with small caseloads (five to seven per support worker) to offer support and brokering access to other services, formalised through a Partnership Agreement and reflected in the tender documents produced.

As each local authority was at a different stage of commissioning readiness, a staged approach was followed. Following an initial market engagement day in Autumn 2018, three authorities issued invitations to tender, which were assessed in January 2019. Subsequently all but two of the authorities undertook successful commissioning exercises.

These two opted for an 'in-house' model due to the comparatively small scale of the eligible population, concerns over the availability of suitable support workers, and the expectation that an internal model would improve the speed of access to local authority owned properties.

The opportunity to **'test out'** different delivery models was seen as a strength of the pilot, as well as spreading the risk should a single provider fail.

The availability of a suitably experienced provider base with the capacity to deliver services at scale has been a concern for the Housing First pilots from the outset, and in at least one case led to their decision to deliver 'in-house'. There were also concerns over the availability of sufficient suitable support workers, with appropriate experience and values, within each area (**see Section 4, page 27**). There was an expectation that additional services would be commissioned as delivery scales up, and so commissioning arrangements should be sufficiently flexible to allow for smaller contracts as well as those for larger Housing First services.

## Service specifications

Design a service specification fit for purpose. Traditional service specifications can include elements which contradict the ethos of Housing First and may affect the delivery of high-fidelity provision (see Section 1, page 9). Be clear about the number of people expected to be supported by the service so that providers can profile their proposal in line with recommended caseload sizes.

### A service specification should include:

- how fidelity to the principles will be maximised and assessed throughout delivery;
- solutions to overcoming housing supply challenges;
- how support will be provided and monitored in line with the principles;
- how Housing First will align with existing services and/or any other system-wide approaches.

Look to involve others who can shape or sense-check the service specification, including those who have been involved in the planning.

## Monitoring and measuring progress

Housing First is a user-led intervention which does not place any requirements on individuals around the types of services they access or addressing specific needs. While information about support needs and service use is useful to collect for monitoring individual progression and measuring impact, the achievement of such outcomes should not be a commissioning requirement, as this could compromise adherence to the Housing First principles.

Whilst everyone involved will want to see individuals supported into homes, be realistic about timeframes for delivering accommodation outcomes. A number of factors can affect the length of time it takes to move an individual into stable accommodation once they're accepted by the service. Expecting this to happen quickly may negatively affect engagement and tenancy sustainability in the long-term.

Similarly, it may take time to reach an agreement on the data to be collected to monitor individuals' progress through the service and the resulting benefits and outcomes. The metrics used, and the way in which the data is collected and analysed, will depend on the scale of the service and whether there is an accompanying evaluation. Irrespective of the detail, services should allow time to agree a set of metrics and responsibilities for collection and analysis from the outset.

Evidence on Housing First is generally collected around **three themes**:

- 1. Fidelity to the principles:** research demonstrates that services with higher fidelity are more effective. Assessing fidelity can help make the case for why the service is successful or shed light on any structural or operational challenges which may be affecting delivery.
- 2. Impact on individuals:** evidence is collected across a range of domains on the experiences of individuals before and whilst accessing Housing First. Tools may be standardised measures or existing service recording systems depending on what is being evaluated. Qualitative reporting and case studies are helpful in showing idiosyncratic changes which can demonstrate valuable impact that might not be captured in other ways.

For change to be measured over time, an initial baseline assessment is essential to capture the individual's circumstances, history and current needs as close as possible to being recruited to the service. Subsequent data collected can be compared to the baseline to capture change and progress more accurately over time. Data collection arrangements must be set within the context of the Housing First principle of choice, rather than setting the expectation that each participant will be working towards the same goals.

- 3. Cost-effectiveness:** information about the contact that people have with services can be useful to demonstrate the value of Housing First to the public purse. Collecting information about an individual's service use for a period before accessing Housing First and then monitoring this over time can be used to make a case locally for sustaining the service in the long-term.

Irrespective of whether data on individuals is collected primarily for monitoring and/or evaluation purposes, it is key that any data collected is useful, and can be used by providers to reflect on their provision, explore whether improvements can be made, and to make the case for increasing and sustaining funding. Efforts taken to reach agreement on metrics, collection and analysis stages between partners will bear fruit through the establishment of a common data set, agreed monitoring protocols, and high quality and relevant monitoring data. Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) need to be formulated very carefully in order to be meaningful, and the associated data collection logistically feasible, given the complexities and needs of the Housing First client group.

## Wider influence

Developing your Housing First service also provides an opportunity to review and amend existing thinking and processes around addressing homelessness for people with multiple and complex needs; needing the wider housing, health and social care system to flex and work differently.



In this way, Housing First may also be a stimulus for 'system change', having an influence beyond its strict remit to influence improved practice for, and revised views and attitudes towards, the target group. The commissioning of Housing First services is one mechanism by which these 'systems change' benefits may be realised.

## 4 Mobilising Housing First

Having established a plan for your Housing First service, and commissioned providers as required, this section explores the key issues around mobilisation. It discusses the time required to reach mobilisation, staffing and recruitment issues, partnership development and the key areas of service delivery.

### Timescales

Mobilising Housing First can take considerable time, especially when being done at scale. Ensure that expectations of senior and political stakeholders are managed from the outset. All of the mobilisation activity is important to ensuring the service will be effective, but the situation can become pressurised if there is a strong focus on the number of people that have been housed.

At scale, centralised functions are vital and these need to be in place before delivery teams are recruited; consider this as a necessary stage in service development and factor in time for subcontracting and staff recruitment. If necessary, consider mobilising 'early adopter' or 'test and learn' delivery teams whilst wider mobilisation takes place.

Formal and informal partnerships and protocols across sectors such as with housing and health providers and the DWP, are useful for operational delivery. Whilst some of this can take place during the planning and commissioning stages, allow time for these to be established. Aim to bring relevant stakeholders on board earlier rather than later.

Producing delivery manuals or a Housing First Charter can help progress mobilisation to a common template – setting out the various protocols required, and the commitment to fidelity to the Housing First principles.



## Example from the pilots: Housing First Commitment Charter

In preparation for mobilisation, one pilot took steps to secure commitment to its activities from housing associations and other partners in their area. It convened a working group (meeting monthly with representation from the largest housing associations in the area) and held a series of workshops and individual meetings to introduce Housing First and establish common understandings. Importantly it also produced a Housing First Commitment Charter along with a delivery handbook for frontline staff. Signees to the Charter included the 15 largest housing associations in the pilot area.



## Example from the pilots: Delivery guide

One of the pilots produced a document for frontline staff in housing association and other partner organisations, which provided information on the Housing First model, evidence of its effectiveness and how it will be delivered in the pilot area, accompanied by operational guidance and examples of the documentation used.

The guide set out the rationale and context for the intervention, including what makes the Housing First model different to more traditional approaches. It then described the pilot model in detail, including the eligibility criteria used, staffing structure and contact points, and a series of frequently asked questions, illustrating how the Housing First principles will be actioned in practice.

Specific information is provided on the role of housing associations in the pilot, including detail on the Housing First delivery process emphasising their role in allocating properties and subsequent tenancy management. Annexes set out the forms to be used to request or transfer properties, with a comprehensive contacts list for individual support workers.

## Staffing

Staffing requirements will depend on the nature of the project developed – primarily in terms of whether services are delivered internally or commissioned externally. Particularly important to consider is the need to support the emotional and wider wellbeing of staff, in recognition of the challenges and pressures associated with working with the service target group and the intensity of the support.

## Centralised programme teams

At a regional level, it may be necessary to have infrastructure support in place. At a local level, oversight and strategic input is usually provided through existing structures, but when delivering a large programme the inclusion of dedicated roles might be essential. These roles may be commissioned out, or held in house, but should be given the necessary authority to undertake their task effectively.

### **A range of roles may be beneficial to achieve:**

- programme and strategic coordination; to oversee one or multiple programmes;
- project management; to manage specific elements of the delivery particularly where multiple organisations are involved;
- quality assurance and data coordination; to monitor progress, identify issues and undertake reporting;
- partnerships and strategic influencing; to undertake work across authorities and sectors ;
- practice development; to support culture change and good practice development;
- property acquisition or lettings leads; to explore pathways into housing and landlord liaisons;
- lived experience involvement; to ensure people with lived experience are involved in all relevant activity;
- internal and external communication; to create consistency across multiple providers and share good news stories;
- commissioning and finance management; where sub-contracting or working to influence commissioning.

## Frontline delivery teams

The ratio of management to delivery staff should be such that staff feel supported in their roles as this will allow them to deliver therapeutic support in line with the principles. Team managers or leaders should have capacity within their roles to be able to respond and proactively address challenges which arise on an individual or systemic level.

At scale, team leaders and other managers benefit from meeting to share learning and foster consistency. This is especially relevant for individuals and organisations new to Housing First.

People with lived experience are extraordinarily valuable in the provision of Housing First, through either paid or voluntary roles, but there must be adequate resources and support in place. This may require a culture shift in some organisations.

## Recruiting staff

Salaries should be competitive in order to recruit and maintain high quality applicants. Regular turnover within teams can compromise the consistency of support, caseload size and fidelity to the principles. If multiple providers are commissioned through the programme, ensure that job descriptions and pay rates are consistent. This will reduce competition in recruitment, potential staff dissatisfaction and the risk that staff will move between providers.

The values and skills required of Housing First support workers are quite different to other roles. Recruiting the right people is essential, so recruitment procedures should be adapted to include values-based exercises that assess the attitudes of applicants and how they relate to and work with others. Consider how the recruitment process can be made more accessible to people who have lived experience.

Involving people with lived experience in the recruitment process can add real value. Their experience and insights can shape the person specifications and job descriptions, and co-producing and delivering the interview process can help to determine which individuals are suited to delivering Housing First.

However, be flexible and consider individuals that show a potential to learn; most people have **'been on a journey'** with Housing First as it turns traditional support work on its head. Training and reflective practice can help staff to **'unlearn'** practices from previous roles.

Recruiting the right people takes time and can be difficult. This is especially so when implementing a scaled-up service and where multiple providers are competing for applicants. Consideration should also be given to how the wider homelessness sector is impacted; be creative regarding where jobs are advertised.

## **Multi-provider service delivery**

At scale, and where multiple support providers are involved, it is beneficial for team managers and partner organisations to come together regularly. This can help to foster coherence and consistency, but care should be taken to avoid stifling flexibility in local provision. Such forums can help to highlight specialist knowledge of different members which can be shared across the programme.

Where multiple providers are delivering Housing First across a number of authorities but within one programme, it can be beneficial to have a single brand and centralised communications about the project as a whole.

## **Subcontracting partner agencies**

At a greater scale it may be beneficial to sub-contract specialised posts to work with Housing First (e.g. mental health or substance misuse staff). These posts can help to circumnavigate systemic barriers, provide specialist expertise and the ability to lever and broker support from elsewhere within their sector.

Specialist posts can share their expertise with the wider workforce through staff training and./or reflective and consultative support. They may also hold a caseload of individuals who need more specialist input.

## **Training and supporting staff**

The importance of providing staff with adequate training and support cannot be underestimated. Many may be new to Housing First and its principles, and it is important to ensure they are trained on the principles and philosophy of the approach.

It can be challenging for staff to transition from traditional support approaches to Housing First. Training and on-going reflection about strengths-based and psychologically informed working can help to shift mind-set and establish new practices. Involve people with lived experience in the training, as their insights can help shift thinking, and investing in reflective practice provides a space for staff to reflect on the emotional aspects of their work and on the challenges.

Where multiple providers are in place it may be appropriate for training and support to be funded and coordinated centrally. This can help to foster relationships across providers and has the added benefit of ensuring that there is consistency in skills development. Opening up training to partner agencies can also raise awareness of new ways of working to encourage culture change to happen more widely.



## Example from the pilots: training support workers

Each pilot developed new and drew upon existing materials in developing training programmes for their support staff. At the time of fieldwork these included induction training and preparing to address on-going training requirements.

Induction and staff training was coordinated centrally within each pilot, and commonly included subjects such as: the Housing First principles; reflective practice, Psychologically Informed Environments (PIE), asset/strengths-based approaches, conflict resolution, self-harm and suicide, and wellbeing and resilience.

Training was being delivered by a mix of Combined Authority, pilot provider and partner organisations, lived experience group representatives, and external stakeholders including Homeless Link (on principles and fidelity).

**Pilot 1:** Induction training comprised one day a week for the first month in post, to include: understanding the Housing First principles, use of local homelessness data systems, safety planning and lone working, the pilot model and partners, asset-based working, psychologically informed environments (PIEs) and welfare benefits.

A subsequent programme of further skills development training, some delivered by facilitated group sessions, included implementing PIE principles, asset-based working in practice, supervision skills (reflective practice), interpersonal skills, managing differently, self-harm and suicide, couples and relationships, conflict resolution, wellbeing and resilience, and implementing Housing First for different equality groups (gender, age, disability, BAME, LGBTQ). Most of the training was delivered by the pilot's central team, with external providers including Homeless link and the local mental health trust.

**Pilot 2:** Staff were offered training in PIE, reflective practice and strengths-based approaches as part of their induction. Homeless Link delivered training on the Housing First principles and maintaining fidelity on an on-going basis, to ensure that all new staff are trained and messages reinforced.

There was also an aspiration for practice to be trauma-informed, with a centrally commissioned training programme that all support workers were expected to attend. Training included understanding the Housing First principles, psychologically informed environments (PIEs), reflective practice and asset-based approaches.

**Pilot 3:** Support workers were recruited from a variety of backgrounds, including the housing, criminal justice and substance misuse fields. Each received an intensive two-week induction and training programme, designed by the pilot team, with additional modules being prepared for delivery during the pilot's test and learn stage.

The support workers interviewed reported positively on the training received, which was felt to be comprehensive and well delivered, and provided them with the specific knowledge required to fulfil their roles. Several commented that the overall recruitment and induction process had made them feel valued, well supported and motivated by the positive attitudes of those around them.

Housing First support workers face a range of challenges in their roles, and maintaining their emotional and overall wellbeing should be important considerations. More widely, factors such as **'burn out'** and **'compassion fatigue'** are typically seen as risks associated with working intensely with vulnerable participant groups, and measures are required to ensure staff are adequately supported in their role. A culture and system of reflective practice is also important to ensure staff have space to think and learn about their work, and its impact.



## Example from the pilots: social and emotional support for staff

Each of the Housing First pilots included approaches to support the social and emotional wellbeing of their staff from the outset, recognising the pressures that accompany their roles.

### **These approaches commonly included:**

- a combination of one-to-one and group support;
- facilitated reflective practice sessions and clinical supervision;
- informal mutual support between colleagues.

### **Consultations with support workers found that the approaches to support were valued, with particular reference being made to the following.**

- Frequent communications between support workers and team leaders – allowing challenges and issues to be discussed collectively in a spirit of openness and mutual support.
- Opportunities for individuals to 'off load' specific experiences one-to-one with colleagues – again within organisational cultures which both encourage disclosure and put systems for response in place.
- Open door policies – team leaders and senior staff making a clear commitment that staff can discuss issues in confidence with their managers at any time was valued.
- The provision of specific, psychologically-informed, support – for example in one pilot where two psychologists commissioned to provide access to mental health services for participants also deliver wellbeing support and reflective practice sessions for staff.





# Developing Partnerships

## Awareness raising

It is important to ensure that relevant senior and operational staff from partner agencies understand the Housing First approach, including how it fits with other services in housing, health and social care. Clarity around the intention for Housing First to be open-ended and sustainable is important, so share and discuss plans to consider together how it may be embedded in local provision.

There may be conflicting pressures and concerns amongst stakeholders, so take time to explore these and co-construct locally achievable solutions. Do not assume that other agencies will offer more flexibility with Housing First residents but do encourage them to be open to exploring new ways of working with Housing First and the individuals being supported.

## Strategic and operational groups

Depending on the scale of the project, establish steering, strategic or working groups to provide governance, strategic support and operational oversight. Invite relevant agencies to be represented in groups including but not limited to:

- housing providers;
- probation and the police;
- the Department of Work and Pensions;
- health and social care agencies.

Developing specific working groups can help to overcome particular challenges, for example issues with housing supply. All groups should be an open and honest space for challenges to be discussed and solutions to be developed collaboratively.

## Developing partnerships to overcome barriers

Specific barriers to delivery can be identified, or anticipated, through a systems mapping exercise. Work strategically to address them but do not assume that information agreed will filter naturally or quickly to operational staff in partner agencies. Flagging this as a potential issue from the outset may help. Development and sign-off from relevant service level agreements and protocols can take time but will be beneficial in the long-term.

# Housing

## Strategic commitment from housing providers

At scale, work with housing providers and authorities to determine allocations pathways and assess whether there is an appetite for schemes such as a social or ethical lettings agency. Recruiting specific posts to help acquire properties, or engage and support landlords, can help to broker relationships and improve delivery.

Gaining strategic commitment from housing providers can help to bring other landlords on board. Service Level Agreements will formalise commitments but may not instigate operational change around allocations and lettings (see [Section 8, page 54](#)). To address this, provide tailored information for operational staff in housing providers. Look for opportunities for frontline support staff and housing association staff to develop relationships and share knowledge and expertise.

Housing providers who also deliver support (and may be commissioned to do so in Housing First) are likely to be more flexible and forthcoming with properties. However, it is important that the support and housing functions are managed separately in line with the principles.

## Sourcing homes from the PRS

Depending on the availability of social rented properties, and in order to maximise choice for individuals, sourcing homes from the private rented sector should be considered. The dynamics and processes of working with private landlords will vary depending on what type of property owner they are.

You may look to offer assurance to landlords through offering bonds or other financial commitments around potential damage to properties. Local and ethical lettings agencies can be a good way at gaining support and housing offers from private landlords, whilst providing a scheme that can manage placements effectively.

## 5 Housing First early delivery

### Service remit

The range of support offered under Housing First varies between areas, influenced by existing service availability, the needs of individuals, and the scale of the project. As a minimum, services comprise teams of support workers who provide direct support and a 'navigator' function to help individuals access any additional support when required. This will necessarily include help in finding and securing a tenancy, preparing a new property for occupation, and negotiating access to social security (welfare benefits), physical and mental health, education and, for some, employment services.

Where appropriate, support workers may also represent individuals' interests in discussions with probation service workers and the police. Support workers also have a role in assisting the individual to integrate into their local community, and to help them to identify and work towards their goals and aspirations.

Given the multiple and complex needs affecting Housing First participants, close working with partner agencies is essential in ensuring that these needs can be met – as well as during the planning stage to identify potential service providers and gaps in provision. In some cases, Housing First services extend beyond the 'support and navigation' functions to include more 'specialist' support as part of their core offer, as in the examples from the pilots below.



### Example from the pilots: social and emotional support for staff

All three pilots include teams of support workers, based in contracted providers or delivered internally, whose roles include engaging new individuals, providing the support required to secure a tenancy, and providing continued support for social and community integration and a '**navigator**' function to help to broker access to other services (according to residents' choice).

The range of support worker activities is matched only by the diversity of need amongst the participant group, and can also include helping secure benefits, addressing long standing debts, accessing physical and mental health services (often for long-standing conditions that may have gone unaddressed), finding treatment opportunities for drug and alcohol use, representing individuals' interests in involvement with the criminal justice system, and helping individuals settle into their new homes by providing help with furnishing, cooking and cleaning.

In the longer term, support workers play an important role in working with individuals that leave or lose their housing, in addition to support focussing on the individual's goals and aspirations. While Housing First services can help individuals address the challenges and issues they face, the focus should be on the longer term and equipping the individual with the life skills and resilience necessary to integrate into society and build self-esteem.

- While in most cases individuals are supported to access mainstream mental and physical health services, two of the pilots recruited staff with specific health remits to support those on the caseload. In one pilot two FTE Dual Diagnosis Practitioners were initially contracted from the local mental health trust, and the number increased to four later, to provide specialist mental health provision to individuals. They worked to improve joint working with mental health and substance misuse services, and to help overcome the barriers individuals with complex needs face in accessing support for mental health and drug/alcohol use.
- In another pilot, two psychologists have been contracted from a local hospital to work with both individuals and staff, the latter as part of the pilot's approach to supporting their emotional and wider wellbeing. In common with the pilot mentioned above, it is anticipated that these dual diagnosis workers will similarly help negotiate access to specialist mental health services for those being supported.



# Entering Housing First

## Eligibility criteria

Housing First is most cost-effective for individuals who face multiple needs and exclusions and for whom other housing pathways and support options may not be suitable.

People who are able to access and sustain contact with other types of housing services are highly unlikely to require the intensity and longevity of support afforded through Housing First. This being so, manage expectations of other agencies that may refer to the service.

If working across multiple authorities or service providers, establish shared eligibility criteria and ensure that these are understood by stakeholders.



## Example from the pilots: eligibility criteria

Each of the pilots developed their own eligibility criteria around the broad themes of homelessness and multiple and complex needs.

**Pilot 1** - Eligible individuals must have multiple needs and not able to be accommodated through an existing pathway. A common methodology is applied to ensure consistency across local authorities, with a paper-based assessment tool being developed based on a slightly adapted version of the New Directions Team assessment. It was emphasised, however, that the resulting scores are not in themselves the sole means of determining an individual's eligibility, and there is room for discretion in the application of the criteria.

The assessment tool comprises 12 domains, covering:

- current accommodation/housing history,
- engagement with frontline services,

- intentional and unintentional self-harm,
- stress and anxiety,
- meaningful use of time,
- social effectiveness,
- risks to and from others,
- alcohol and drug abuse,
- personal self-care and hygiene

Each is rated on a five-point scale to capture an individual's level of multiple need and exclusion - with a maximum score of 60, an indicative threshold score for eligibility was set at 38, although this is not applied rigidly and is subject to review. In addition to this score, other considerations include: the level of interest in taking up the Housing First offer, willingness to take up an independent tenancy, the level of perceived risk posed by their current lifestyle, and any forthcoming events likely to negatively impact on their ability to start a tenancy.

**Pilot 2** - A set of eligibility criteria for the test and learn pilot were established. Eligibility was not determined using a single tool but rather through a combination of methods, which included personal choice and histories of:

- homelessness or unstable housing,
- repeated substance misuse,
- enduring mental and/or physical health issues,
- profound learning difficulties and
- long term and deteriorating physical health;
- repeat offending.

In addition, the criteria also include judgements on whether other alternative service options would pose a significant risk to the individual. On referral, individual circumstances and histories were viewed in the round by a multi-agency panel set up for the pilot to establish whether the threshold for participation had been reached.

**Pilot 3** - To be eligible to join the third pilot programme, individuals should, in addition to being homeless, have at least two of the following needs:

- entrenched rough sleeping;
- affected by poor mental and/or physical health;

- a history of offending;
- a history of domestic abuse;
- individuals serially excluded from services;
- individuals with substance misuse issues.

The criteria applied for joining the programme are therefore:

- Being homeless or at risk of becoming so, or entrenched rough sleeping, and have complex needs,
- Individuals with complex needs and are identified by housing advice agencies or other partners likely to become homeless within 56 days,
- Having at least two additional needs (above), with the chaos index/New Directions Team Assessment being used where needed to determine eligibility based on the highest need,
- Being at risk of exclusion from mainstream or supported housing due to behaviour, previous behaviour or complexity of needs, and
- Having the mental capacity to enter into and understand that they are entering into a legally binding tenancy agreement.

However, as in other areas, the professional judgement of staff is key in determining an individual's appropriateness for the service.

Keep in mind that Housing First may not be the right option for everybody. Learning from the pilots shows that those who lack capacity (e.g., are affected by cognitive impairments), those who have healthcare needs which exceed what Housing First can realistically accommodate, and individuals who do not want Housing First (at the point it is offered, at least) may require alternative provision. Developing and promoting solutions for them should remain a key priority for researchers, practitioners and policy makers going forward.

## Assessing eligibility

One tool that can be used to assess eligibility for Housing First is the New Directions Team assessment.<sup>9</sup> This tool helps stakeholders be more objective in determining need, based on behaviours and vulnerability, and can help to prioritise individuals.

However, the assessment process should ensure that particular groups (e.g. women, care leavers) are not overlooked. They may score low on the tool due to their patterns of contact with services. Allow referring agencies and assessors to be flexible in their decision making to ensure vulnerable people are not excluded.

Part of the assessment process may include the individual's willingness to have a tenancy or any particular events or circumstances which may impact this significantly. Opinions about an individual's ability to sustain a tenancy, in light of previous housing history, should not be factored in and steps should be taken to prevent 'cherry picking' (where individuals are selected primarily on the basis of providers' perceptions regarding their likelihood of achieving an outcome, rather than their level of need).

Finally, irrespective of the eligibility criteria followed or tools used, providers should consider how the recruitment process to their Housing First services is experienced by individuals. From the individual perspective the process should be as low key as possible, to avoid triggering previous trauma. It is not uncommon for individuals to disclose previously unknown issues once they have established trust with their support workers, and so the recruitment process must balance the need to collect sufficient information to identify and address individual's needs with appearing bureaucratic and intrusive.

## Referral and decision making processes

Tailor the referral process based on local context and the scale of delivery. If delivering at scale, preparation work with referring agencies can take time but will be useful in ensuring that referrals made are appropriate. Where there are competing homelessness programmes, ensure sensible decisions are made based on which individuals would benefit from Housing First in the long-term; this may mean moving people across programmes in some circumstances.

Decisions to accept someone onto Housing First should be made by a panel. This will reduce the likelihood of overly subjective decision making and increase control and oversight of the partners involved. Panel meetings should include the support provider and could be undertaken at existing multi-agency forums if appropriate.

During this process try to reduce layers of bureaucracy, guard against unrealistic timeframes and ensure the process mitigates raising expectations of individuals that may be inappropriately referred. Meetings between the Housing First team, referring agency and individual can be very constructive, but are difficult to arrange, resource intensive and can delay the process. Look to ensure these can be delivered with maximum flexibility.



Expect that some individuals may be difficult to locate or initiate contact with after the point of referral. Those accepted onto Housing First will not necessarily be ready to engage immediately in the process of finding housing, and engagement with support may be intermittent. Some eligible individuals may even decline the offer of Housing First, in which case they should be given an 'open referral' and the ability to access the service whenever they choose.

As the experience of the Housing First pilots suggests, support teams must balance maintaining an 'open door' policy for individuals meeting the eligibility criteria but choosing not to access the service, with the most effective use of their resources. Much time can be spent attempting to engage, or maintain contact with, those who are 'harder to engage', sometimes with limited results. However, it is these very people where Housing First can have the greatest impact, so tolerance around (non-)engagement, and an understanding of the difficulties some people have accepting support, must be taken into consideration.

The scope of the service, and availability of other outreach provision in your area, will determine the time and flexibility given to the pre-tenancy engagement phase of the support work. Intensive outreach can be seen as an important part of the service as it allows a trusting relationship to be established where other services are unable to dedicate this capacity. Challenges to engagement may therefore be expected and should be factored into service design.

In other cases, decisions may be made about when the Housing First team should stop trying to make or sustain contact to ensure the resource is used effectively. It is recommended that this is done on a case-by-case basis and that an open referral is in place should that person wish to access the service later on. Contact from the Housing First team may continue sporadically and other providers, such as the outreach team, will continue to attempt engagement and offer the service.



## Top Tip:

### engaging potential participants

The experience of the pilots suggests that a range of strategies can be employed to engage new participants. These include where individuals may be reluctant to engage for a variety of reasons e.g. feeling that they have been 'let down' by services; their experience of trauma makes it difficult for them to accept help, trust others and reengage with perceived authority.

Support workers report that providing potential participants with a clear understanding of the Housing First programme, and the degree of choice around where they are housed and the services they receive, can be helpful in differentiating their services from existing provision.

The Pilots provide copies of this **guide for people offered Housing First**



# Part Two

Delivering Housing First

# Delivering Housing First

As the pilots have progressed, there has been much to learn about effective delivery of Housing First support, including the residents' support journeys, supporting the Housing First team and the role of housing and working with others. This second part of the toolkit will explore each of these areas in more depth. It is structured as follows:

- **Section 6:** The support journey
- **Section 7:** The Housing First team
- **Section 8:** The housing in Housing First
- **Section 9:** Working with others
- **Section 10:** Beyond delivery

## 6 The Support Journey

According to principle two (**see Section 1, page 3**), flexible support should be available for as long as it is needed. Over time, an individual's support needs will almost certainly change. Although there are no set 'phases' in the support journey, there are key elements to keep in mind.

### Pre-tenancy support

At the point a referral is accepted and allocated to a support worker, the support journey begins. It is likely to be some time before housing is allocated to the person (**see Section 8, page 56**) and this a key time to get to know the individual and build the relationship. It is important that the individual has as much information as possible about the Housing First service, including their rights and responsibilities. The pilot areas used the co-produced *Homeless Link A Guide to Housing First* to frame these conversations with residents: **A Guide to Housing First**

Some people may be reluctant to accept, or fearful of, the support and housing on offer and the initial engagement may need to be taken more slowly to enable the necessary trust to be built. Remember principle five (**see Section 1, page 4**) and ensure staff are confident in using an active engagement approach. In some instances, peer mentors can have more success, especially where individuals are reluctant to engage.

Individuals should not be expected or forced to accept assistance with housing. The principle of choice applies strongly here; the individual must want to take on a tenancy. As one Housing First pilot provider emphasised: “You can’t do Housing First to people.”

Don’t make promises, define timescales or pressure individuals to engage or make decisions. Take time to build a relationship and explore the individual’s interests and preferences around housing. Focus on achieving the softer outcomes which are important at this stage such as improved levels of engagement and positive conversations about accessing housing.

## Building a relationship of trust

It is sometimes said that Housing First should be called Relationships First due to the level of value and importance in the quality of the relationship between resident and support worker. The pilots identified some ‘magic ingredients’ which have proven invaluable in promoting, building and maintaining positive relationships.

### The magic ingredients

- Perseverance or ‘not giving up’. Being solution focused so that if something doesn’t work a different approach is tried.
- Finding new ways to engage with people through getting to know their habits and preferences.
- Being open and honest. Demonstrating practically and repeatedly that the worker can be trusted. This means following through on commitments made.
- Enabling the resident to be open and honest, for example letting them know that it’s okay to say, ‘I’m using drugs today and I don’t want to see you’.
- Taking a trauma-informed approach, knowing how this affects trust and working through this.
- Giving positive feedback. Saying ‘I’m proud of you’, and acknowledging that the small steps people take are big for them and something to be proud of.
- Not expecting people to jump through hoops and adapt to the service – the service needs to adapt to them.
- Being person-led and not target-focussed.
- Understanding that if someone doesn’t want to engage at a particular timepoint, they may do later.

## Creating a home

There is a difference between a house and a home. Workers should put effort into supporting a resident to create a sense of connection and ownership over the property. This has a significant impact for residents of Housing First, which consequently has a positive effect on tenancy sustainment.

It is important to consider the physical space, and what is to help bricks and mortar feel like home (**see personal budgets**). In addition, creating a sense of connection means a focus on safety as well as feeling accepted and part of the broader community. In Housing First, one of the most significant moments in a resident's journey is when they refer to their property as 'home.'

## Personal budgets

Funds that enable an individual to settle into their home are important and often included in the commissioned support contract. The amount allocated to personal budgets can vary, and the more funding available the more flexibility is afforded to the resident and Housing First team. It should be expected that a significant amount of money will be needed at the point of moving in and creating a home.

Moving in should be a positive experience and work is needed both pre and post move-in day. As best practice, the property should have floor and wall coverings as well as some basic furniture in readiness for the resident to move in. As time goes on, support should be given to help the resident make it their home, decorating in the style they like, buying items that reflect personality and choice. Housing First services may need a separate furniture fund and can also build partnerships with local services (e.g. new or used furniture retailers) to secure free or reduced-price items.

Personal budgets can also support principle six, basing the service on people's strengths, goals and aspirations and enabling them to explore interests and achieve their goals, for example accessing art classes, joining a gym or reconnecting with family members. This is an important part of enabling recovery, developing confidence, skills and self-esteem. The fund should be used in a personalised way, maximising the resident's choice and control over spending. If the person needs to transfer property (**see Section 8, page 59**) then additional funds may be required for a second tenancy set-up, and consideration should be given to this at the beginning of the contract.

For further information on the use of personal budgets, see Homeless Link guidance: **Personal Budgets Briefing**

## Community integration

The support journey in Housing First is not linear and community integration activities can happen at any time and in unpredictable patterns. Community integration should be viewed as part of the ongoing work for Housing First. The choice of activities pursued should be person-led and it can help if the Housing First worker makes suggestions, introduces ideas and shows interest and enthusiasm in different activities (maybe even from their own personal preferences).

In the pilot evaluation, there are examples of residents volunteering at a local community centre, taking up a British Sign Language course and engaging with neighbours for pizza nights and dog walking. For some Housing First projects there is a strong sense of 'internal' community, through co-production panels and involvement in activities such as Legislative Theatre.

The issue of loneliness is significant for people who are often moving away from their familiar communities on the streets/in hostels, to live alone. Building social capital and networks should remain high on the agenda in conversations between workers and residents.

## Managing safety

Whilst it is important to understand the risk an individual may pose or be vulnerable to, identifying any such risk should be done in a way which reduces stigma and recognises resiliency factors. Housing First is underpinned by strengths-based and harm reduction approaches, so there should be a focus on 'safety' rather than 'risk'.

It is easier to have difficult conversations when a level of trust has been established, which is why it is essential to take time to build relationships. Be open and transparent about why information is required and be reflective regarding when and where such discussions are held. Make these interventions purposeful and meaningful for both the service and the individual. In line with principles four and seven, balance the wishes and choices of individuals carefully with the duty to reduce harm and improve wellbeing.

Develop safety planning protocols and work with other agencies where appropriate to plan and adopt interventions. Always involve the individual concerned and co-create safety plans with them if they are amenable to this. Consider practical tools to support safety, such as camera doorbells, CCTV, a key safe and having emergency contact information.

Cuckooing is a significant risk in Housing First ([see Section 3, page 18](#)).

## Working with specific groups

Housing First is usually available to anyone over the age of 18 who meets the relevant referral criteria for the service. Within the cohort, there may be some specific groups who have additional needs and consideration should be given to staff training and development, as well as partnership working arrangements.

When working with women, a gender-informed approach is needed, which may mean that it takes a little more time to build the relationship and that more intensive support is required. Outside of the pilots, some women-specific Housing First services recommend a lower caseload of 1:5 worker to resident ratio. It is also important to note that there is a high prevalence of domestic abuse and gender-based violence experiences for women in Housing First, so knowledge and training are essential for the team. Finally, the impact of motherhood and the loss of children is a consideration when supporting women.

For more information on this see Homeless Link's guide: **Supporting Women in Housing First** Brighter Futures also produced the Reconnecting Families toolkit: **The Reconnecting Families Toolkit**

Young people also have different support needs and requirements in Housing First. See this information about Housing First for Youth services: **Housing First For Youth** and useful for services to consider positive youth development approaches.

## Fluctuating need

Whilst moving someone into housing is a significant outcome, it is not the end of the journey and is often the point where increased levels of support are required.<sup>10</sup>

New residents often require a great deal of support and reassurance early on and may have fears that they will be unable to sustain the tenancy or feel isolated.

Once someone has moved into housing, tailor the support provided to meet their needs and be ready for this to change over time. Individuals may need support around independent living skills, identifying and working to reach aspirations and managing relationships and reconnecting with family. Through harm reduction and motivational interviewing, staff should encourage individuals to access other services when this is right for them.

Although Housing First support should be tailored and flexed around the needs of individuals, it is likely that most of this can be provided within normal office hours. Support workers should have

the autonomy to flex their working hours to meet the needs of those on their caseloads and should expect to be able to do so if necessary. Offering out of hours telephone support is useful for checking well-being and can also offer a point of contact for landlords, partner agencies and neighbours where appropriate.

The number of hours of support per individual each week will vary depending on their needs at any given time. Periods where intensive support is needed include moving into the property, being released from prison, or where a crisis occurs. There may be periods where there is limited contact with the individual, such as if they temporarily withdraw from support or go to prison or hospital or where support needs reduce.

## Managing transitions

Once an individual is in their tenancy, they may be settled for periods and go through different transitions. Transitions can include going to prison, being admitted to hospital, moving to alternative accommodation, or moving away from intensive support (sometimes known as 'graduation'). If considering graduation, there are some key elements to hold in mind:




Key element	Do	Don't
Time	Be person-centred	Create time-limit milestones
KPIs	Think - tenancy, networks, safety	Set rigid criteria
Decision-making	Make joint decisions with the resident and delivery partners	Force or compel someone to agree to a closure
Support	Think of support in broad terms	See non-engagement as a reason for closure
Fluctuating need	Take a trial period	See a period of stability as a definitive sign that support is not needed
Relationships	Consider step-down options	Underestimate the importance of your relationship
Closure	Remember it is unlikely in Housing First	Make closure a service goal

Homeless Link has a comprehensive guide on Managing Transitions in Housing First which can be used to develop service-level processes: [Managing Transitions in Housing First Services](#)



## Red, Amber, Green (RAG) Rating System

To better understand the specific needs of the Housing First cohort, a RAG rating system may be useful.

-  May be in a position to graduate
-  Requires floating support
-  Requires ongoing intensive Housing First support

Providing a RAG rating system can be useful if it looks like there may be a changes in provider and/or to keep track of changes in residents' needs at various points.

It is important to note that no longer requiring intensive support should not be a service goal in Housing First. Support is available for as long as it is needed and research shows that only a small number of people in England , no longer require intensive support. In the same research, and in line with the Pilot areas, it was found that, sadly, one of the most common reasons for exiting Housing First is death, and it is important to provide staff with training and support around death and dying.

## 7 The Housing First team

The work in Housing First is undoubtedly challenging and the team require ongoing training and support to operate effectively. There are some key considerations in ensuring the team's needs are met and managing the impact of any staff changes on caseloads.

### Staff support, retention and training

Staff support is very important given the demands of the job and the toll it can take on workers' well-being. Best practice from the pilots showed that support workers should receive clinical supervision and reflective practice sessions on a regular basis. These are highly valued, providing the opportunity to 'off-load', share experiences with others and explore strategies for resolving challenges. It is also recommended that workers can interact with residents who have made progress in their recovery journey.

The level of staff support should mitigate high turn-over within the team; however, the reality of Housing First is that it is a demanding role, often with insecure funding and it is likely that there will be challenges around staff retention.

It is important that the Housing First team have access to good quality Housing First training and that ongoing training needs are met. It may be that some specific training is required based on the cohort need, for example Palliative Care training or supporting survivors of domestic abuse.

### Managing staff absence

As with any service, there may be short and long-term absences from work. Due to the close and intensive relationship between residents and workers, the impact of staff absence can be significant for residents.

Introducing individuals to different team members, and even having a secondary worker, can help to manage the impact of any staff absence, with temporary support being continually provided from an already familiar and trusted person. If the absence continues for a long period, it is highly likely that worker caseloads will increase and potentially exceed the maximum 1:7 recommended ratio. If this happens, there should be a clear and proactive plan to reduce caseloads as soon as possible.

## Managing staff turnover

It is likely that there will be staff turnover and changes as new team members are recruited. It is important that new members of staff are given access to the same training and development opportunities as original staff. A change of workers can pose challenges to the relationship with the resident and time needs to be given for the resident to process any feelings of abandonment, loss and anger. It may be the engagement with the resident is more difficult and a new worker should treat the first few weeks or even months like the initial engagement period, with a strong emphasis on building trust (see above magic ingredients list). It is important to try and mitigate the impact of any staff changes insofar as possible.

## Maintaining fidelity

Fidelity to the Housing First principles is an ongoing endeavour for the Housing First team and others involved in the service, such as commissioners and partners. There should be a culture of 'fidelity as everyone's business' which can be achieved by ensuring that all supervision, team meetings and case management meetings refer to the principles. Some services like to have a visual reminder by sticking them to the wall of the office. Learning from the regional pilots has shown that more formal processes around fidelity assurance are effective, e.g., through the introduction of a Fidelity Self-Assessment Tool and Quality Assurance Audits.



### Top Tips:

1. Take time to have an open and honest conversation with the resident about the staffing changes. If possible, allow the worker and resident to mark the end of their relationship in a way that works for them.
2. Ensure that there is a second worker involved in the resident's support and make this as consistent as possible during the transition period.
3. Give a robust and detailed handover to the new worker about the resident's journey so far, what is known to work and not work for their support.
4. Allow a period of transition, with joint visits between new and existing members of staff.
5. Be prepared for a drop in engagement and support the new member of staff with their active engagement approach.

## Being a champion of Housing First

Unlike more traditional or well-known housing/support services, Housing First may be a relatively new or unknown model among local authority staff, landlords and other partners, the local community and even within the Housing First service's own organisation. All staff involved in Housing First are ambassadors for the model and should promote the philosophy, principles and approaches of Housing First wherever possible, to ensure everyone understands and can work collaboratively for the benefit of the residents. There may be a need for staff to positively challenge negative or prejudiced views toward people experiencing multiple disadvantage and push-back where practices are not in line with the core principles. The concept of 'systems change' is very important to Housing First and all staff play a role in facilitating this.

## 8 The housing in Housing First

Housing First is a housing and support model and the importance of housing provider partnerships should not be underestimated. Although housing and support are kept as separate elements, there is also an ongoing need to build and maintain close working relationships between support providers and housing management teams.

### Meeting the housing need

Providers and commissioners should focus on maximising the choice and control available to a resident over their housing. It is important to remember that all choice has its limitations and the options available will vary depending on local housing markets and the partnership agreements that are in place. Housing First teams will benefit from having a diverse housing portfolio, which may include partnerships with different social landlords.



## Delivering in-house

Although more common to have separate providers of support and housing in Housing First, the pilot areas have seen successes with in-house delivery, where the support provider is also the social landlord. For one area, in-house delivery has meant flexible access to housing and a greater degree of autonomy in working toward the key principles. Residents have reported high levels of satisfaction and a genuine sense of a 'home for life.' In line with principle three, it is essential for housing and support functions to remain separate. When delivering in-house, there must be two distinct and separately funded teams for support and housing management.

Whatever the situation, the housing identified should be affordable to individuals and whilst there may be additional funding available to increase access, e.g. rent deposits, take care to ensure that an individual will be able to sustain their housing costs in the long-term.

There will need to be a degree of flexibility in the allocations policies and procedures of both local authorities and housing providers. Local authorities may agree to ring-fence a certain number of nominations for Housing First and housing providers may offer a number of properties. However, matching individuals to properties should take place once their requirements and preferences have been identified. This can take longer but will reduce the likelihood of eviction and/or abandonment.

Individuals with specific needs, such as those with disabilities, those with pets or those requiring low-rise properties, may wait longer. However, housing departments may be able to offer more flexibility to reduce waiting times for individuals.

Flexible practice can include facilitating direct lets so that individuals don't have to bid and being understanding about how an individual engages in the process. Missed appointments or viewings should be understood in relation to the individual's needs and not be interpreted as non-compliance or an indication that they do not want a home.

Support workers play a key role in helping individuals to identify their housing preferences. Discussions about what an individual would like and the reality of the local housing context and affordability can help to manage expectations while still facilitating choice. Discuss both the private and social rented sectors if this will increase the options available to them.

Individuals may find it difficult to understand their options or verbalise their preferences so take this into consideration. Accompanying individuals to different areas and, if possible different property types, can help them to further consider their options.

## Sourcing housing

Sourcing housing can present numerous challenges, and these are especially significant when delivering Housing First at scale. They include pressurised markets, inflexible allocations policies and competing demands with other priority groups or homelessness initiatives. Welfare policies, such as the spare room subsidy and Local Housing Allowance can also impact delivery.

Consideration of the types and location of properties is needed. Due to the nature of the Housing First cohort, a 360-degree risk assessment of the property will mitigate the likelihood of issues arising further down the line. The team should consider:

- the neighbourhood and dynamics between neighbours
- meeting physical health needs, for example homes with ground floor access for people with mobility difficulties
- properties with reduced communal spaces to support the individual to manage interactions with neighbours
- safeguarding in relation to property locations.

This should be factored in at the planning stage when considering expectations around housing outcomes.



### Top Tip:

#### Visiting areas in advance

The pilot evaluation identified cases where individuals were choosing the areas they would like to live in based on previous recollection, sometimes from many years ago. Several support workers described taking individuals to their selected areas in advance to have a look around, which in some cases led them to change their minds.

In other cases, visits provided insights into the availability of local facilities, activities and transport provision which helped inform the individual's choice of accommodation.

## Collaboration Agreements

It is usual practice for Service Level Agreements (SLAs) to be drawn up to formalise the relationship between the Housing First service and housing providers. As the pilots have progressed, the teams realised that SLAs were limited and not entirely fit for purpose, prompting a move to Collaboration Agreements, which:

- provide absolute clarity on expectations from both support and housing providers on housing supply and ongoing joint working protocols
- create a set of shared values and commitments to solidify the relationship.
- prompt continual learning and reflection.

Over time it is likely that housing partnerships will evolve and adapt as learning is embedded. This may mean reviewing agreements created, adapting joint working protocols and potentially developing new housing partnerships.

Access to the private rented sector (PRS) should be a consideration in Housing First as it can help to broaden the housing portfolio and increase the choice available to residents. Experiences in pilot areas has been mixed, with a relatively small number of PRS properties used; however, in other areas in England there have been successes.

Ongoing exploration of housing options is essential. For more information on international examples, see: [housingfirsteurope.eu/wp-content/](https://housingfirsteurope.eu/wp-content/)

## Working with landlords

The partnership with landlords is an essential ingredient of Housing First and must be prioritised and nurtured from mobilisation to established delivery. In the beginning, landlords may be reluctant to be involved with Housing First for a range of different reasons, including:

- past experiences of partnering with homelessness initiatives
- concerns about risk and anti-social behaviour
- negative ideas/expectations of people who experience multiple disadvantage
- fears around the sustainability of funding and risk that support may not continue.

### **To overcome such concerns, the pilots have had successes by:**

- embedding an ethos of collaboration, jointly creating SLAs/Collaboration Agreements and working protocols and problem-solving together
- valuing a landlord's expertise, such as their in-depth knowledge of local neighbourhoods
- providing comprehensive and on-going Housing First training, including key approaches such as trauma-informed care and strengths-based practice
- sharing and celebrating successes
- working together to make the case for the continuation of the Housing First service. This might mean conducting a service evaluation, sharing case studies and/or holding events.

## **Timescales for housing**

There may be a perception in Housing First that an individual will move into a tenancy immediately after referral, but this is not always the case nor the best approach. Although housing should be provided to people as soon as possible, there is a need to be honest and realistic about the timescales. Taking time to maximise choice and finding the best housing fit for an individual is more important, and more fruitful longer-term.

As described above, the pre-tenancy period is crucial to relationship building and getting to know the resident – understanding an individual's hopes and fears. It may take some time before a person is ready to move into a tenancy and workers may witness 'self-sabotaging' behaviours such as rejecting numerous housing offers or dropping out of contact. Housing should not be forced, and there should be no pressure for an individual to accept a housing offer.

To ensure a truly person-centred approach, there should be no set timescales on moving into housing. However, if there are long delays in moving a person into housing, teams should focus on this and look at solutions to improve the speed of housing offers.



## Improving housing access

Although a housing provider may make a specific number of pledges for housing units to Housing First, if the tenancy ends, then the property is taken back into general needs. The pilot areas have successfully negotiated with their housing partners for allocated properties to stay within the Housing First pool, which means that if a property becomes available it can be easily reallocated to a new resident (where appropriate), significantly improving move-in timescales.

## The role of temporary housing

As Housing First is not exclusively a rough sleeping intervention, individuals may have a range of housing statuses at the point of referral. This may include, but not be limited to, being in:

- prison/hospital/rehab
- unstable housing such as sofa surfing
- another housing option such as supported or temporary housing.

Housing First should not be viewed as an emergency response to an individual's housing need and if they are referred at the point of release from prison, discharge from hospital/rehab or eviction from another housing project, then clear communication is needed to manage expectations about moving into permanent housing (see timescales above). It is therefore very likely that an individual will require a temporary housing option for a period until they move into their tenancy. It is important that this is understood by all partners, including commissioners of services, to promote joint working and collaboration and avoid criticism such as issues around 'double funding' for an individual.

## Working in partnership with housing management teams

There is a balance to be found in keeping housing and support as separate functions whilst also promoting effective joint working across teams. It is recommended that teams write a joint working protocol which clearly sets out the remit of each team, whilst promoting collaboration at all stages of the process including sign-ups, moving-in, dealing with issues and celebrating successes. For more information see Homeless Link's guide: **Guide to Housing Support Joint Working**



### Top Tips:

1. Be clear with the resident about the roles of the support worker and housing management worker.
2. Conduct some joint visits, at times of both success and difficulty in the tenancy.
3. Organise regular case discussion meetings.
4. Find effective ways to share information.
5. Explore training opportunities for both teams and ensure there is a consistent approach for the resident.
6. Create shared goals around tenancy sustainment.
7. Allow time for learning and new ways of working to be put into practice.
8. Review joint working protocols to resolve disagreements/tensions.

## Anti-social behaviour (ASB) and cuckooing

Instances of ASB are usually much lower than anticipated, but that is not to say that it does not happen. Learning from the pilot areas shows that prevention is better than a cure and the most effective strategies for managing ASB happen before the tenant even moves in. Some key activities include:

- understanding the resident's needs and making informed choices about the location of the tenancy, the personality and needs of surrounding tenants and any other factors which may impact on tenancy sustainment.
- putting time into conversations with individuals to ensure they are fully informed about their responsibilities as a tenant.
- building solid relationships with residents so that difficult conversations can be held about behaviour and expectations.
- building solid relationships with housing management teams so that joint working around complaints is done effectively and compassionately.



### Top Tips:

Where there are issues of ASB it is important not to make assumptions and ensure that any investigations are carried out thoroughly and fairly. It is not unusual for neighbours to falsify or embellish issues due to a general dislike of the resident, and some work may be needed to build/re-build these relationships. Time is of the essence and any issues should be addressed as quickly as possible to prevent escalation, which is why it can be helpful to have a phone number that is given to neighbours.

Regular joint meetings, including other partners such as the police, will ensure information is shared consistently and that decision making is informed and collaborative. Ultimately, Housing First may be calling on housing providers to deal with issues such as ASB in a different way to standard policies and procedures and there should be time given for learning, reflection and support to all staff involved.

If all possible avenues have been explored to make the tenancy work but issues continue, then it may be necessary to look at transferring the person to alternative accommodation.

Cuckooing is the practice of taking over the home of a vulnerable person to establish a base for illegal drug dealing, typically as part of a county lines operation. Unfortunately, some Housing First residents can be vulnerable to this and it is important that teams know the signs and can respond effectively. A cuckooing toolkit was published by Groundswell and can be found here: [groundswell.org.uk/westminster-hhcp/toolkits](https://groundswell.org.uk/westminster-hhcp/toolkits)

## Transferring property

In line with the first principle of Housing First, people have a right to a home, and it is important to remember that it is the offer of a tenancy which remains permanent, rather than the tenancy itself. It is more typical for a resident to remain in their first tenancy, although moving to a second or third tenancy is possible. It is likely that services will underestimate the need for a resident to move so this should be factored in, particularly when considering housing supply and availability of personalisation funds.

Although there is high tenancy sustainment in Housing First, delivering this type of service is not without challenge due to the complexity of people's needs and other factors outside a person's control which may impact their housing. If the first tenancy is unsuccessful, it should not be viewed as a failure and instead a learning opportunity for the resident and their support team. It is a chance to explore what has worked, where and how challenges arose and what could be done differently. There should be no hesitation about offering upwards of a second choice, housing is a human right and the team will continue to try to make it work for the individual. For a very small proportion of residents, it might be agreed that living in an independent tenancy is not the right option, in which case alternative services may be considered. This may mean working alongside other agencies such as Adult Social Care and Homeless Link's guidance on managing transitions will be helpful in such cases: [Managing Transitions in Housing First services](#)

## 9 Working with others

Housing First is not an island, and effective delivery relies on strong partnerships. In each local system, there will be a range of existing formal and informal relationships between services that will have an impact on delivery. Housing First provides an opportunity to explore and strengthen these partnerships to ensure that holistic support is available to residents.

### The complexity of need

Learning from the pilots and additional research from Homeless Link shows that the complexity of need for individuals is very high.

#### Information from pilot areas:<sup>11</sup>

- **96% of people** have experiences of rough sleeping
- **71% of people** have experiences of drug use
- **75% of people** have spent time in prison
- **61% of people** report a long-standing illness or disability, with a high prevalence of mental health conditions

#### Information from Homeless Link research:<sup>12</sup>

- Mortality rates are very high, with death being the main reason for exit from Housing First
- A small number of people move from Housing First to more intensive housing support, such as a care setting

To ensure residents are able to access the full range of care and support they need, and to support the work of the Housing First team, a multi-agency approach is required. To deliver effective multi-agency working, strong partnerships must be forged.

## Building partnerships

Beyond the crucial partnerships between support and housing providers (see Section 3, page 18) there are several other partners that will be involved in meeting the needs of those accessing Housing First, including but not limited to:

- primary care teams including G.Ps, pharmacists and dentists
- hospital teams including ambulance and A&E, discharge and specialist care teams
- the local authority, including Housing Options, Adult Social Care, Children’s Services and domestic abuse teams
- criminal justice services including police, probation, courts and prisons
  - the Department of Work and Pensions
  - other Voluntary and Community Sector organisations and community groups.

They should work on building knowledge and understanding of the Housing First model, creating formal and informal partnership agreements and building relationships between frontline and management teams.

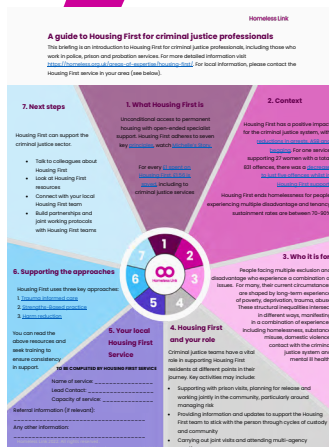
See Section 4, page 33 on multi-agency steering groups as another way to build partnership working in from mobilisation.



## Top Tips:

**Use Homeless Link’s guides to Housing First for partners to start conversations with key services.**

There are five guides available and all can be edited to include details of your local Housing First service: <https://homeless.org.uk/knowledge-hub/engaging-other-sectors-in-housing-first>



## Developing a consistent approach

Based on the Housing First principles and good practice development, key approaches including trauma-informed care, strengths-based working and harm reduction are essential for delivering effective support. These sit at the core of Housing First and how services treat, react and respond to behaviour and offer support.

When working in partnership, there can sometimes be a tension between different agencies and the extent to which they understand and adopt these approaches. These differences mean residents experience inconsistencies in their interactions between services which can be unhelpful for collaboration, decision making and overall relationship building. Housing First can be a 'vehicle for systems change' by building understanding of multiple disadvantage and the processes and practices that work most effectively to support those experiencing it. This can be slow and long-term work and other organisations may require training/development around systems thinking and practice.



### Top Tips:

Consider workforce development opportunities and offer training to different services to build their knowledge and understanding of trauma and trauma-informed practices. Developing and delivering training may be an opportunity to co-produce with residents.

## Multi-agency meetings

Multi-agency meetings are highly valued in Housing First and should be prioritised. If there are existing multi-agency meetings with a remit of multiple disadvantage locally, time may be needed to understand the landscape of these meetings and to secure invites for the Housing First team. It may be the case that no multi-agency meetings exist, in which case the Housing First team can build initiate these with partners. There should be clear and agreed terms of reference, commitment to attendance and an information sharing agreement. It may help to include the principles and some core values to the terms of reference to ensure a consistent approach from all members.

## Multi-agency panels

The pilots have implemented multi-agency panels, which are represented by relevant local agencies. The panels have been used for a variety of activities, including:

- consideration of referrals into Housing First and, where not suitable, referral to more appropriate services
- design and agreement of packages of wrap-around support for individuals accepted onto Housing First
- establishment of or engagement with existing parallel multi-disciplinary meetings to review service user progress and support

An established example is Team Around Me (TAM), which was developed by a London-based Housing First service, Single Homeless Project (SHP). TAM centres the resident in the conversation and promotes a truly person-centred approach to problem solving and decision making and can be replicated using SHP's guidance and templates: [shp.org.uk/news/team-around-me-enabling-people-experiencing-multiple-disadvantage-to-take-control-of-their-own-support](https://shp.org.uk/news/team-around-me-enabling-people-experiencing-multiple-disadvantage-to-take-control-of-their-own-support)

## No longer a rough sleeper

It is common for there to be specialist rough sleeper services set up for people to access, these may include specific health provision such as GP/nurse and substance misuse services. As a Housing First resident moves into their tenancy (and is hence no longer homeless) there can be challenges around ongoing eligibility and access to these specialist services. Try to work with services to avoid rigid rules being applied and to allow access to remain as flexible and person-centred as possible. It may help to involve commissioners in these conversations to ensure that residents' needs are met.



## Dealing with challenges

Although the relationship between the support and housing management teams is central to dealing with tenancy issues (see Section 3, page 18), involvement of other professionals to deal with challenges is also crucial. Some behaviours, which are often deemed to be ‘anti-social’ can be the result of unmet support needs, and resolutions can be found in communication, collaboration and a joint commitment to tenancy sustainment, rather than punitive action. Below are some examples to consider.

Challenge	Potential causes	Actions
The home is very unhygienic and neighbours are complaining about unpleasant smells.	Individual has unmet care and support needs and is struggling to live independently.	Speak to Adult Social Care and consider a care needs assessment to access additional support.
The home is in a state of disrepair, floorboards have been removed and holes knocked into walls.	Individual is having a mental health crisis and is paranoid about the safety of the tenancy.	Involve GP and mental health services and work with the individual to keep them safe.
Complaints from neighbours about shouting and loud noises at night.	Individual is experiencing domestic abuse and has lost control of their front door. Abuser has taken over the property without permission, but resident is afraid to speak to anyone.	Ensure the team are trained in recognising the signs of domestic abuse (DA). Involve specialist DA services and the police, where appropriate.
Excessive visitors to the property, complaints from neighbours about suspected illegal activity.	The property may have been cuckooed.  The individual may be sex working.	Ensure the team are trained in recognising the signs of cuckooing. Work with housing and police partners to consider a property transfer.  Ensure the team are trained in supporting sex workers, and are familiar with relevant law. Work with the individual and landlord and promote safe practices.

The Housing First team can hold valuable knowledge about a resident and are often best placed to identify triggers and recognise out of character responses or a deterioration in health. This should be shared with other partners to support decision making and action planning.

## Embedding specialist roles

In some circumstances, partnerships with mainstream services only go so far in meeting the support needs of residents and it may therefore be useful to consider embedding specialist roles into the Housing First team. As noted in Section 1.2, in Housing First there are two types of support structure:

1. **Intensive Case Management (ICM)** where the resident is supported by an intensive support worker (this is the most common structure in the UK).
2. **Assertive Community Treatment (ACT)** where the resident is supported by a range of different specialist workers embedded into the Housing First team (more common in the USA with some examples in the UK).

ACT is not commonly seen in the UK, but something in this vein can be made possible through pooled funding arrangements or secondment opportunities for staff from other agencies. The decision to embed specialist roles should be based on resident need and may vary for different services.

Examples of specialist roles might include, but are not limited to, dual diagnosis worker, psychologist, psychiatrist, occupational therapist, trauma counsellor and drug and alcohol worker. There is more information available from Homeless Link's learning report on embedding specialist workers -

**HF Grants Reports Final**



## A spotlight on dual diagnosis

*“Over the years people have slipped through the gaps and we’ve had constant battles with mental health services [and] substance misuse services ... the dual diagnosis practitioners have fill[ed] the definite gaps that have been there.” (Housing First stakeholder)*

The pilots saw successes in embedding dual diagnosis workers (DDWs) into Housing First. Where used, the DDWs were able to break down barriers in accessing healthcare for the Housing First cohort. They were also able to upskill support workers through training and supervision. The Housing First team saw significant improvements in their knowledge and understanding of the mental health and broader healthcare system, which in turn helped them to successfully advocate for the residents they supported. Similarly, the involvement of DDWs helped improve understanding of the target group’s needs amongst stakeholders in the health sector. It was concluded DDWs add substantial value to the Housing First service.

## 10 Beyond delivery

Housing First is not yet a mainstream offer in England, with most services still in a pilot phase. A pilot means that there is a constant ‘funding sunset’ hanging over a Housing First service and this can have a detrimental impact on delivery. It is difficult to provide ‘support for as long as it is needed’ when there are no guarantees the service will continue. This can also have an impact on staffing, with workers moving to new posts to find more security.



### Top Tips:

#### Beyond a pilot

1. Think about sustainability from the beginning and start ‘future proofing’ as soon as possible.
2. Learning from the regional pilots shows that setting up a task and finish group can help to bring people together to think, problem solve and plan.
3. Build the evidence base on why the Housing First service is needed. This might be a formal evaluation report or storytelling including written case studies and video. This may also include cost benefit analysis.
4. Think creatively about funding sources, including cross-departmental funding.

Housing First is not specifically a rough sleeping intervention. Tenancy sustainment is one outcome of Housing First, but there are many others including improved wellbeing, increased engagement with health services and reductions in offending and substance use. It is important to consider the potential for cross-sector funding for Housing First, working with, for example, Integrated Care Boards, local authorities and criminal justice services. As Housing First becomes a standard part of the housing and support system in England, more will be understood about what does and does not work. It is important to build a culture of learning for all Housing First services as knowledge and need evolves over time.



## Top Tips:

### A culture of learning

#### **Internally**

Create space for reflection with senior leaders in the organisation and help to embed learning from Housing First delivery to other services.

#### **Partners**

Share both successes and challenges and hold learning events to build knowledge and understanding.

#### **Commissioners**

Don't be afraid to have hard conversations about changing expectations/contractual arrangements. It may be that what was agreed in the beginning is no longer fit for purpose - a flexible approach is crucial.

#### **National**

Housing First is greater than the sum of its parts. In delivering Housing First, the service is part of a movement across England and all learning and challenges can be shared.

## Further information

This toolkit provides information about how to plan, mobilise and deliver a Housing First service.

### Housing First in England

For more information on developing and delivering Housing First in England visit the Housing First England website for resources, research and to learn about training and events:

[homeless.org.uk/areas-of-expertise/housing-first](https://homeless.org.uk/areas-of-expertise/housing-first)

### Housing First in Europe

The Housing First Europe hub website provides information and evidence to support the scaling up of Housing First in Europe, including the Housing First guide - Europe on the principles and delivery of Housing First:

[housingfirsteurope.eu](https://housingfirsteurope.eu)

### Housing First in Canada

The Canadian Housing First toolkit is an interactive resource providing comprehensive information for those developing and delivering Housing First:

[housingfirsttoolkit.ca](https://housingfirsttoolkit.ca)



## Appendix: list of full website links

Pg 2	<a href="https://homeless.org.uk/areas-of-expertise/housing-first/">https://homeless.org.uk/areas-of-expertise/housing-first/</a>
Pg 6	<a href="https://homeless.org.uk/knowledge-hub/regional-housing-first-pilots/">https://homeless.org.uk/knowledge-hub/regional-housing-first-pilots/</a>
Pg 13	<a href="https://homeless.org.uk/areas-of-expertise/housing-first/">https://homeless.org.uk/areas-of-expertise/housing-first/</a>
Pg 18	<a href="https://homeless.org.uk/areas-of-expertise/housing-first/">https://homeless.org.uk/areas-of-expertise/housing-first/</a>
Pg 41	<a href="https://hfe.homeless.org.uk/sites/default/files/attachments/Guide%20for%20people%20offered%20Housing%20First.pdf">https://hfe.homeless.org.uk/sites/default/files/attachments/Guide%20for%20people%20offered%20Housing%20First.pdf</a>
Pg 43	<a href="https://homelesslink-1b54.kxcdn.com/media/documents/Guide_for_people_offered_Housing_First.pdf">https://homelesslink-1b54.kxcdn.com/media/documents/Guide_for_people_offered_Housing_First.pdf</a>
Pg 45	<a href="https://homelesslink-1b54.kxcdn.com/media/documents/Personal_budgets_briefing.pdf">https://homelesslink-1b54.kxcdn.com/media/documents/Personal_budgets_briefing.pdf</a>
Pg 47	<a href="https://homelesslink-1b54.kxcdn.com/media/documents/Supporting_Women_in_Housing_First.pdf">https://homelesslink-1b54.kxcdn.com/media/documents/Supporting_Women_in_Housing_First.pdf</a> <a href="https://homelesslink-1b54.kxcdn.com/media/documents/The_Reconnecting_Families_Toolkit_-_Brighter_Futures_Housing_First.pdf">https://homelesslink-1b54.kxcdn.com/media/documents/The_Reconnecting_Families_Toolkit_-_Brighter_Futures_Housing_First.pdf</a> <a href="https://homeless.org.uk/areas-of-expertise/housing-first/housing-first-for-youth/">https://homeless.org.uk/areas-of-expertise/housing-first/housing-first-for-youth/</a> and useful for services to consider positive youth development approaches
Pg 48	<a href="https://homelesslink-1b54.kxcdn.com/media/documents/Managing_transitions_in_Housing_First_services.pdf">https://homelesslink-1b54.kxcdn.com/media/documents/Managing_transitions_in_Housing_First_services.pdf</a>
Pg 55	<a href="https://housingfirsteurope.eu/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/HF_SourcingHousing_final_web.pdf">https://housingfirsteurope.eu/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/HF_SourcingHousing_final_web.pdf</a>
Pg 58	<a href="https://homelesslink-1b54.kxcdn.com/media/documents/Guide_to_housing_support_joint_working.pdf">https://homelesslink-1b54.kxcdn.com/media/documents/Guide_to_housing_support_joint_working.pdf</a>
Pg 60	<a href="https://groundswell.org.uk/westminster-hhcp/toolkits">https://groundswell.org.uk/westminster-hhcp/toolkits</a> <a href="https://homelesslink-1b54.kxcdn.com/media/documents/Managing_transitions_in_Housing_First_services.pdf">https://homelesslink-1b54.kxcdn.com/media/documents/Managing_transitions_in_Housing_First_services.pdf</a>
Pg 64	<a href="https://www.shp.org.uk/news/team-around-me-enabling-people-experiencing-multiple-disadvantage-to-take-control-of-their-own-support">https://www.shp.org.uk/news/team-around-me-enabling-people-experiencing-multiple-disadvantage-to-take-control-of-their-own-support</a>
Pg 66	<a href="http://cdn-homelesslink-production.s3-website-eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/media/documents/HF_Grants_Reports_Final.pdf">http://cdn-homelesslink-production.s3-website-eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/media/documents/HF_Grants_Reports_Final.pdf</a>
Pg 69	<a href="https://homeless.org.uk/areas-of-expertise/housing-first/">https://homeless.org.uk/areas-of-expertise/housing-first/</a> <a href="https://housingfirsteurope.eu/">https://housingfirsteurope.eu/</a> <a href="http://housingfirsttoolkit.ca/">http://housingfirsttoolkit.ca/</a>

# 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.



**Homeless Link**

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**[www.homeless.org.uk](http://www.homeless.org.uk)** • @HomelessLink

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