

Transferring Housing First Providers

Good practice guidance

About

Commissioning Housing First

Housing First continues to scale-up across all regions of England and short-term pilots have the potential to become a mainstream offer from Local Authorities.

As Housing First becomes more embedded in local systems, it will be subject to procurement and commissioning processes. A procurement process may mean that a local area experiences a change in its commissioned Housing First provider.

This guidance will look at good practice when transferring from one provider to another for the delivery of Housing First, and is aimed at funders, commissioners and service delivery teams. The advice covers processes from the start of the procurement procedure, through to the first phase of delivery.

The guidance should be used in conjunction with Housing First England Commissioner Resources¹, with particular reference to the Mobilisation Toolkit².

With thanks

As there has been little change in the delivery providers of Housing First in England to date, this guidance has been created with key partners including Cranstoun and Homeless Network Scotland.

¹ <https://homeless.org.uk/knowledge-hub/for-commissioners/>

² https://homelesslink-1b54.kxcdn.com/media/documents/MHCLG_Mobilising_Housing_First_Toolkit.pdf

Introduction

Research shows that relationships between Housing First residents and staff are critical to the delivery of an effective service³. Disruption to this relationship can be detrimental to those being supported and according to learning from the Scottish Pathfinder, **changes to provider should be avoided or as infrequent as possible**⁴.

Where it is necessary to make changes to the provider, there are several key good practice areas to consider to help ensure a smooth transition.

Commissioning and funding considerations

The Principles and Psychologically Informed Environments (PIE)

The procurement framework should be based around the seven Housing First Principles⁵ and the five non-negotiables for England⁶. Potential providers should be assessed based on their ability to deliver in accordance with the principles and the non-negotiables. The financial envelope for the service should be informed by the 1:7 worker to resident ratio, as set out in the non-negotiables.

A new provider should have demonstrable evidence to show a track record in delivering trauma-informed care and psychologically informed environments, with ongoing investment in training and support for staff.

Choosing a provider

A Housing First provider may be a provider of homelessness support services, a social landlord or both. There are pros and cons to each of these approaches, but however the service is delivered it is essential that there is a clear separation of housing and support. If a social landlord is commissioned to deliver the support, it would be important that they demonstrate the Housing First principles in action and not rely on existing housing or tenancy management processes.

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https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1102005/Housing_First_Evaluation_Third_process_report.pdf

⁴ https://pure.hw.ac.uk/ws/portalfiles/portal/65371618/PathfinderEvaluation_FinalReport_Full.pdf

⁵ https://homelesslink-1b54.kxcdn.com/media/documents/The_Principles_for_Housing_First.pdf

⁶ https://homelesslink-1b54.kxcdn.com/media/documents/Housing_First_non-negotiables.pdf

The involvement of Housing First residents is important in choosing the new provider to ensure both continuity of delivery and building positive relationships. It is recommended to use **co-production**⁷ to meaningfully support residents to contribute toward the procurement process.

Data Permissions

Agreeing data permissions to transfer information from one provider to another is key. This should be done in line with GDPR and with the support of the relevant data control officers from both organisations.

A data sharing process should be agreed well in advance of the contract change, with both providers in a position to share and receive the information for each Housing First resident (further details below on the nature of this information).

A data sharing agreement between key parties is strongly advised to facilitate quick and effective information sharing which will aid service delivery.

Timescales

The timescales may depend on the complexity of the new contract. If there are no contractual changes with the incumbent service, there should be a minimum transition period of three months. If there are contractual changes, then a longer mobilisation period of at least six months will be required for the transition.

⁷ <https://homeless.org.uk/knowledge-hub/co-production-toolkit/>

Delivery considerations

Information transfer

Once a data transfer process has been agreed, the incumbent provider and the new provider should work together closely, meeting regularly and working to the best interests of each Housing First resident.

The information to be transferred includes:

1. Overview of each resident. This Information can be transferred in a spreadsheet with such details as:

Name	Age and DOB	Gender Identity	Accommodation status & Address	Tenancy sustainment	Worker
Joe Smith	10.11.83 39	Cis-Male	Housed 1 Whitehall Street ABI CD2	1 year and 3 months	Jess Smith

2. Safety plan (copy of)
3. Support plan (copy of)
4. Summary of personalisation spend (copy of)

In addition to this centrally held information, a **Getting to Know Me Plan** can be co-produced with each resident, where information is communicated in a strengths-based way, in language agreed with the resident. There may also be a need to create a **Transition Plan**, where a template is designed and completed by both providers, involving the resident where possible.

Relationships

The relationship between the Housing First worker and resident is central to the success of the Housing First approach. The residents being supported by Housing First have often had few positive and trusting relationships in their life, including with other professionals who have supported them. Building trust is a long and slow process and the bond between the resident and their worker is special. For this reason, a change in support worker can be a very disruptive for a Housing First resident and the same worker should be retained in the transition from one service

provider to another wherever possible. If this is not possible, there should be a transition process agreed to help to limit the impact of the change in worker. There are several ways to support this transition, including:

1. Organising joint visits between the old and new worker (there may be a funding implication with this)
2. Taking part in activities to build connection
3. Creating space to talk about worries and concerns and empowering the resident to feel part of the process
4. Jointly creating a Getting to Know Me plan with the resident
5. Building engagement slowly

As the case is handed over to a new worker, it will be like starting from the beginning with the relationship and there should therefore be a high level of tolerance for issues such as disengagement, anger and returning to unhelpful coping strategies to manage emotions.

Time should also be given to thinking about the best possible match between workers and residents, finding complementary personality traits which will support the process of building connection.

Relationships go both ways and if the workers of an outgoing provider are no longer able to support their residents, then there may be a lot of emotions surrounding the change. Providers should acknowledge this difficult time and provide additional support to staff, where needed.

Recruitment

As providers of the service change, it may be the case that the workers are protected under the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) regulations (TUPE), in which case they can move to a new employer to continue with their Housing First role. In this situation, it may be possible for residents to retain the same worker, which will reduce the disruption to the relationship. However, there may be other challenges with this process. For example, the worker may be used to their previous employer delivering Housing First in a certain way, and this could create tensions with their new employer. Time should be taken to induct the employee into their new organisation expectations re-set in relation to the delivery of the service and space given for reflective conversations.

It is possible that an employee decides not to TUPE over to the new organisation, in which case a recruitment process will be required, or TUPE may not be an option

and the new employer may need to undertake a full recruitment process. Recruitment⁸ should be started as soon as possible, taking into account the potential delays around new staff being able to start in relation to DBS checks, notice periods and holidays. If delays to recruitment cause caseloads to increase beyond the maximum of seven per Housing First worker, then this should be for a very temporary period only and additional support put in place for workers. If possible, providers should consider the use of Bank Staff, to help temporarily manage caseload pressures.

Communication

To ensure that key partners are on board and understand any changes to the Housing First service, a re-launch event could be organised. This is an opportunity to both celebrate the good work of the incumbent provider and introduce the new team.

The principles of Housing First should ensure that there is consistency in service delivery regardless of the provider and a launch event, plus any other communications work should clearly promote the principles and their role.

A multi-disciplinary approach is crucial for successful Housing First delivery and the new team's contact details should be shared, and opportunities created to ensure good working relationships across partnerships. This might entail presenting at other teams' weekly meetings or inviting partners into the Housing First team meeting and could even include open days for partners to come along and hear about Housing First.

Through any transition, ensure that the partnership with housing providers is held centrally and involve housing management teams in any discussions and changes that a new contract may lead to. A change in support provider may be an opportunity to review and change existing Service Level Agreements and reflect on what opportunities a new contract could offer.

Closing cases

A change in provider should not be viewed as an opportunity to close down long-term Housing First cases. As stated in the principles, flexible support is provided for as long as it is needed and this should extend between providers. It may be that a

⁸ <https://jobs.homeless.org.uk/job-description-templates/>

review of the caseload is an opportunity to consider changes to the support offer, but this should be done in line with the Managing Transitions guidance⁹.

⁹ https://homelesslink-1b54.kxcdn.com/media/documents/Managing_transitions_in_Housing_First_services.pdf

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.

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Together**

