



HOUSING FIRST HOW TO

Tips from frontline
professionals



Working with social landlords

We held a series of events, bringing together frontline Housing First teams from across the country to share learning and best practice around a range of prevalent issues, and help the development of Housing First services. The discussions informed this series of practical information, which outlines common experiences and recommended approaches.

Aims of this document

Presently, approximately only half of Housing First services have access to social housing, which offers residents the stability, affordability and flexibility that they need. This document aims to share staff's key learning and recommendations on how services can work effectively with social housing providers and identify new, suitable partners, to ensure successful outcomes for the individuals they support.

Who is it for?

- Housing First managers and staff teams
- Social landlords
- Commissioners.

“We need more work to ensure social landlords understand Housing First and the residents it supports. At the moment they can be quick to suggest eviction and they don't always understand the clients' needs. We're fighting a stigma.”

London Housing First worker

Understanding Housing First

Housing providers wishing to get involved in Housing First should have a proper understanding of the [principles](#) and philosophy behind the approach. It is felt that this should be championed from the top of their organisation, to overcome or pre-empt any resistance or risk averseness.

It is felt that all involved should have a general awareness of the model and the evidence showing that Housing First works. It is also important to have an understanding of the 'long game' – that there may be issues during the tenancy, but that residents should improve over time and make progress in other areas of their lives.

Property allocations

Housing should be suitable for the individual, good quality, in decent areas and not generally hard to let; residents should not be set up to fail or ghettoised. Individuals should be offered a choice about where they are housed and offered a transfer to other areas if more appropriate (while retaining access to the Housing First support).

It is felt that it would be useful to avoid allocations policies within local authorities where possible, as Housing First clients are often not found to be eligible for a referral to social housing and/or the process is too bureaucratic. A clear commitment and clarity around how properties are to be allocated would be useful for all involved.

Working with Housing First tenants

To ensure that housing provider staff work effectively with this client group, it is important to remove preconditions to housing access (in line with the principles), and to implement a more positive risk taking approach. It is also essential for staff to have a clear understanding of the cohort.

Empathy and compassion are important when dealing with Housing First tenants, as are not labelling people or being overly concerned about any support needs they may have (unless they are impacting tenancy sustainment).

Housing First teams recommend that housing providers would benefit from establishing an on-going rapport with the tenant; they should respond appropriately and reasonably to any arising issues and understand that tenants may need different support to others. It will also be important to understand the practical requirements and issues faced by this cohort (for example, they are unlikely to have access to online facilities and may have limited belongings and furniture).

Effective partnership working

Good partnership working is necessary to effectively support an individual accessing Housing First. It is felt that the remits of the Housing First support team and housing staff should be negotiated and set out from the beginning, including through service level agreements.

Joint working between Housing First workers and housing officers is also important, with everyone aware of each other's roles and the wider objectives and remits of the work. It is recommended that housing officers are willing to do what is best for the tenant, to trust in the judgement of the Housing First worker (who has established a good relationship with the tenant) and to engage in an open dialogue and joint visits with them. To enable this to happen effectively, it is vital to have named housing officers, Housing First workers and other relevant contacts.

Handling problems

Housing First teams asked that social landlords refrain from judging people on their past behaviours and offer a 'clean slate'. It was suggested that histories of anti-social behaviour can be discussed, and a common approach to managing challenging behaviour established, through multi-agency teams involving the social landlord.

Housing First teams recommend establishing how social landlords communicate with their tenants, and asking that the teams themselves are the first point of contact when issues are being addressed. Notices or letters sent automatically to a Housing First tenant can impact their engagement and lead to unnecessary anxiety. It was noted that the first few weeks in a new tenancy can be difficult and that there would ideally be a 'settling in period', which would allow more flexibility and understanding of issues that arise.

Further information

Housing First England

www.hfe.homeless.org.uk

Sourcing social housing:

[Housing First: Guidance for Support Providers](#) (pages 18-21)

How Housing First benefits landlords:

[Housing First: Guidance for Social Landlords](#) (pages 7-8)



What we do

Homeless Link is the national membership charity for frontline homelessness agencies and the wider housing with health, care and support sector. We work to improve services through research, training and guidance, and to promote policy change that will ensure everyone has a place to call home and the support they need to keep it.

Let's end homelessness together

Homeless Link
Minories House
2-5 Minories
London EC3N 1BJ
020 7840 4430

www.homeless.org.uk

[@Homelesslink](https://twitter.com/Homelesslink)

[@homelesslink](https://www.facebook.com/homelesslink)



For more information:
www.hfe.homeless.org.uk
[@hf_england](https://twitter.com/hf_england)



Funded by

**Lankelly
Chase**