

# Housing First

## Guidance for Support Providers

**Let's end homelessness together**

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# Housing First

## Guidance for Support Providers

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## Foreword

### Rick Henderson, Chief Executive of Homeless Link

Housing First is an innovative approach, proven to successfully support people with repeat histories of homelessness, who experience multiple disadvantages, into independent and stable accommodation. Based around a set of core principles, which are designed to achieve optimum outcomes, Housing First is about doing things differently; it requires flexibility and creativity from everyone involved, from support providers and commissioners to housing suppliers.

Research shows that 70-90% of Housing First residents maintain their tenancy, and are empowered to improve other aspects of their lives. This cost-effective approach is popular internationally, and the movement in England is growing, but there is still a need to establish services across the country so that this important support is available to everyone who needs it.

Homeless Link is calling on support providers to fulfil this need, by setting up a Housing First project that meets the requirements of their local communities. For those already offering Housing First, we are asking you to champion the approach to other providers, local partners and potential funders, and to share with us how your service has overcome any challenges it has faced, so we can disseminate the learning across the sector.

We aim to support providers with guidance, good practice examples, training and networking opportunities, and to address head-on the systemic challenges involved in delivering Housing First, including accessing suitable housing and funding opportunities.

We look forward to working with you to make Housing First a fundamental element of the support you provide – and towards fully establishing the approach as a vital part of the solution to ending homelessness.

## About this guidance

This guidance has been written for organisations wishing to provide support in a Housing First context and is information collated from service providers operating within England. The use of Housing First is still relatively new and different models and practice are emerging all the time. This document will be updated when required, but provides an introduction to delivering support using the Housing First approach. Throughout the document we mention resources used by current services; we hope to add these to our website in due course.

Thanks to staff from a range of Housing First services for their input into this guidance.

### Housing First England

This guidance has been written as part of Homeless Link's Housing First England project. Homeless Link is the national membership body for the homelessness and supported housing sectors in England. Housing First England is a three-year project which aims to make Housing First a viable housing option in England to support Homeless Link's vision of a country free of homelessness.

Visit our website [www.hfe.homeless.org.uk](http://www.hfe.homeless.org.uk) and follow us on twitter @HF\_England for updates.

# Introduction to Housing First

Housing First is about doing things differently. The internationally evidence-based approach indicates that individuals experiencing multiple disadvantage are more likely to lead fulfilling lives if they are provided with a stable home and good quality, open-ended support.

Existing homelessness provision, which requires a person to prove they are ready for housing by placing a number of conditions on them, does not work for many. In Housing First, the only requirement is that the individual wants to maintain a tenancy. Unlike traditional supported accommodation models, the individual is not required to address any other needs they might have, or engage with other services, in order to keep their home.

## The principles of Housing First

It is universally agreed that in order to achieve the optimal outcomes for people supported through Housing First, the service provided must adhere to the approach's core philosophy and principles. Research shows that the more a service aligns to the principles, the better the outcomes achieved. This is known as fidelity.

The principles for Housing First in England are:

1. People have a right to a home
2. Flexible support is provided for as long as is needed
3. Housing and support are separated
4. Individuals have choice and control
5. An active engagement approach is used
6. People are supported to identify their strengths, goals and aspirations
7. A harm reduction approach is used

This guidance aims to support organisations to put these principles into practice. The principles can be found on our website along with a webinar about why and how these principles were established:

<http://hfe.homeless.org.uk/principles-housing-first>

## The success of Housing First

International evidence shows that using Housing First enables 70-90% of people to sustain housing. Research into nine pilot services in England (conducted by York University, 2015) found that 74% of Housing First tenants had been housed for a year or more. This study also found no evidence of increased drug or alcohol use, or anti-social behaviour. Many individuals reported improvements in their mental and physical health, and some had increased contact with their family and other social networks. When considering the cohort of people supported by Housing First, these outcomes are outstanding compared to progress made in other types of supported housing provision.

While the evidence base for the use of Housing First in England is limited (most projects had not been operating long when research was undertaken so longer term outcomes have not been evaluated) the trends are consistent with the evidence collected in other countries.

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The 2015 evaluation of nine pilots of Housing First, in addition to more recent evaluations, can be found here: <http://hfe.homeless.org.uk/resource/research-evaluation>.

## Housing First in England

Housing First is not new to the UK. The first project was established by Turning Point Scotland in Glasgow in 2010. Other projects arose in 2012 in London and Newcastle. Over the last few years more areas have become interested in the approach, and in 2015 research was undertaken into [nine pilot services](#) delivered across England, as mentioned above.

A separate scoping exercise that we conducted in 2015 found that fidelity to the core principles of Housing First across services in England was greatly varied. This was one of the main drivers for establishing the Housing First England project and developing a set of principles for the successful use of the approach in England. The scoping report, 'Housing First or Housing Led' can be found at: [www.hfe.homeless.org.uk/resource/research-evaluation](http://www.hfe.homeless.org.uk/resource/research-evaluation).

The [map](#) on the Housing First England website shows the location of services and how long they have been in operation. If your service is not on the map, please get in touch so we can add you.

## The history of Housing First

The roots of Housing First are generally traced back to New York in the 1990s when Pathways to Housing offered this new housing and support model to homeless people with severe and enduring mental illness. They found that giving people a stable base from which to rebuild their lives was hugely successful. They collected evidence on the outcomes and were able to promote their work.

The Pathways to Housing model defined a set of key principles deemed integral to the success of the approach. They also developed operational guidelines to enable support providers to replicate the model. Housing First has now been widely adopted across the US and is growing in popularity across Europe. In many countries, Housing First is central to national homelessness strategies. However as other countries began to use Housing First, the way in which services were delivered had to change for the context of that country. Despite this, research has shown that services that aligned to the key principles of the approach still achieved good outcomes.

## Housing First in Europe

There is a growing movement in the promotion and use of Housing First across Europe. In 2016, FEANTSA (European Federation of National Organisations Working with the Homeless) created the Housing First Guide Europe; an online resource packed with information and videos for those wishing to deliver Housing First. The guide can be accessed here: <http://housingfirstguide.eu/website/>.

The Pathways to Housing principles were slightly amended in the Housing First Guide Europe to reflect the contextual differences between Europe and the US, and between countries within Europe. The main difference relates to the type of housing used; whether this is scattered across a community or congregate (e.g. many Housing First homes in one block). There are arguments on both sides of the fence relating to community integration and isolation.

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The Y-Foundation (Finland) and FEANTSA, along with 15 partners, have established the Housing First Europe Hub which will work to provide training, research and good practice across Europe. Visit <http://housingfirsteurope.eu/> for more information.

# Who needs Housing First in your area?

## Establishing eligibility

Many Housing First services in England focus their resources on people who have been street homeless for sustained periods or who have had repeated ineffective accommodation stays resulting in intermittent periods of rough sleeping. There are some exceptions however, and those involved in designing the service may choose to target resources at people who may not be sleeping rough.

Housing First is most cost-effective when offered to individuals experiencing multiple disadvantage, whom traditional services have been unable to successfully support. Individuals are also likely to have had repeat contact with high cost public services in the health and criminal justice sectors.

When identifying a referral criteria or target group, it is important to ensure that the above is highlighted, to prevent people with lower needs from being cherry picked and those with higher needs being excluded. The aim of Housing First is to reach a group of people whom existing services are unable to support effectively.

## Examples of eligibility criteria

The **Camden Housing First** service was established for individuals in the hostel pathway for at least three years who were not moving on towards independence.

The **Threshold service** in Greater Manchester was established for women with histories of offending and other vulnerabilities, alongside rough sleeping and sofa surfing. The women are referred by probation, women's services and prison, homelessness services, domestic violence services, and other landlords. Many of these women have been involved in domestic violence relationships, and have multiple needs.

## Caseload size

Due to the level of need and intensity of support, Housing First teams have small caseloads. One worker should not be supporting any more than seven individuals to ensure that flexible, wrap-around support can be provided. Many Housing First projects have started with just ten individuals in the first year.

As the support offer is open ended, individuals will remain on the caseload in subsequent years but the intensity of the support may vary. For this reason, there is potential to take on a couple of new people but on the whole services will need to increase capacity in order to increase the caseload considerably.

## Identifying the cohort

There appear to be two main ways in which agencies in England identify individuals who will be offered Housing First. It is important that anyone involved in this decision-making avoids judging how able a person will be to maintain a tenancy based on their prior knowledge or experience of them. Housing First is about trying something different, and believing in a person's ability to make positive changes.

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- **Multi-agency approach**

Many Housing First services decide upon their residents through discussions with partner agencies. In most cases the decision-making group is already established (e.g. a task and targeting group, or multiple needs/homelessness forum) and in other cases a new group might be set up to discuss referrals (e.g. at a steering group or stakeholder panel).

Groups may already have a list of people who are discussed on a regular basis or may allow any agency to suggest suitable people. In both cases it is highly likely that the majority of individuals considered will be well known to most stakeholders who will, over many years, have had varying degrees of contact with them.

- **Index assessment approach**

Some Housing First services use a numerical measure to assess whether the person is eligible for Housing First. The index most widely used is the [New Directions Team assessment](#) (otherwise known as the Chaos Index). This assessment focusses on the behaviours of an individual; their use of services and levels of risk taking. The form enables services to establish a numerical value around the vulnerability of the person, in order to target resources at those most suitable.

The assessment can be used in multi-agency group discussions or as part of a referral system that does not use a stakeholder group to identify suitable people.

**Threshold Housing First** service in Greater Manchester has incorporated the Complex Needs Assessment into their referral form, which can be found here, along with information for referring agencies:

<http://thp.org.uk/services/HousingFirst>

## Housing First and women

Providers of Housing First in England have consistently found that women accessing their services have specific needs and vulnerabilities not shared by their male counterparts. Significant histories of trauma, domestic violence and having children removed, are experiences shared by most of the women. Increased physical and emotional safety, greater vigilance against domestic violence and abuse, and facilitated contact with social services are additional reasons for providing Housing First for women.

Further evidence around needs and good practice is being collected on this topic, which we will share when published. In the meantime, the interim evaluation of the Threshold Housing First service may be of interest:

<http://hfe.homeless.org.uk/resource/research-evaluation>.



## Delivering the support

The support provided to someone by a Housing First service must be underpinned by the key principles. Not only will this ensure that the service is in line with the evidence-based Housing First approach, but it will also ensure success in terms of tenancy sustainment and other improved outcomes.

It is important to get buy in from all stakeholders. Ensure housing providers, the local authority and other partners are aware of the principles, and the intention and evidence of Housing First.

There are a number of case studies on our website which demonstrate these principles and the impact they have had on the lives of those accessing Housing First support: <http://hfe.homeless.org.uk/life-stories>.

### The principles in practice

#### 1. People have a right to a home

The individual needs to be willing to maintain a tenancy as a responsible tenant, rather than needing to prove they are ready to have their own tenancy. Accessing stable housing is prioritised over any other need, and the offer of housing is permanent; if they abandon or lose their home another will be identified, and this is communicated to them.

Where possible, the individual should be the tenancy holder. In rare cases where a license agreement is given (i.e. if the provider or local authority is leasing the property and subletting it) there should be arrangements for the tenancy to be handed to the resident in due course, or for that person to be moved into their own tenancy as soon as possible.

Housing First is about giving a person a home. They should make decisions on where they live, how they decorate and furnish it and who they have to visit. Their accommodation is their home, and not a place of work as in other supported housing models.

#### Example in a service

Unlike many other homelessness services, the only condition placed on a person offered a Housing First service, is that they must want to try to maintain a tenancy. Housing First teams spend time preparing the individual to understand their rights and responsibilities as a tenant, including providing realistic information about other costs incurred (e.g. utility bills) and on being a good neighbour. Housing First teams also speak to future tenants about the possibility of them feeling isolated, and provide them with advice about how to manage who they allow into their new home. These conversations continue once a person is housed.

#### 2. Flexible support is provided for as long as is needed

There is no fixed end date to the support. An individual is advised that there will always be support available to them when they need it. The intensity of the support varies depending on what the person requires, how long they have been housed and whether any crises occur. They might need daily contact (either by phone or face to face) when they first move in. This may or may not reduce over time.

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Small caseloads are important to allow the hours available to a person to flex depending on their needs. In practice no case is ever closed and the team should have capacity to offer support to cases which have become dormant (e.g. if the person disappeared, went into prison or hospital or had a period of non-engagement).

Where individuals no longer require or wish to access the support the team will inform the person that should they need the service again in the future it will be there for them to access.

**St Mungo's Housing First** service in Camden has developed a Graduation Pack for tenants who no longer want to access support. The pack includes a summary of the tenant's achievements along with information about all services and contact details they may need. The offer of support from the team is always available in the future and this is included in the pack.

### 3. Housing and support are separated

The separation of accommodation and support is perhaps the greatest difference between Housing First and the traditional supported housing options offered to single homeless people. This principle means that any choice the individual makes about their support does not affect their housing. They are responsible for maintaining their tenancy and are advised that the support will always be available to them whether they wish to engage or not.

Equally, should there be an issue with the tenancy, and the tenant either leaves or loses their home, the offer of support does not end. There may be a number of reasons for an individual losing or leaving their tenancy. It could be due to circumstances out of their control (e.g. landlord increases the rent and it becomes unaffordable) or due to personal choice (e.g. the tenant is finding the pressure too much and decides they do not want housing at this time). In either circumstance the person is supported to find a new home by the team when they are ready.

Housing First teams provide unconditional positive regard to the people they support. They acknowledge that the individual may struggle to maintain a tenancy but re-inforce the message that they will always be there to support the person to try again should something go wrong. However there may be situations where it becomes apparent that Housing First is not the most appropriate option for someone, for instance if they are clearly unable to maintain a tenancy after repeated attempts and little improvement. An example may be where problematic behaviour continues following one failed tenancy, with little evidence of a willingness to change their behaviour, and a high risk of this scenario re-occurring.

### 4. Individuals have choice and control

Many people accessing Housing First may have felt disempowered by the actions of others or institutionalised by services they have had contact with from a young age. For this reason, they may have struggled to engage in situations where there is an evident power imbalance; where the service attempts to make the person 'fit' their requirements and places a number of conditions before providing the service. The aim of Housing First is to empower people to have as much choice and control over their lives as possible.

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Within reason (relating to individual and environmental factors), an individual should have as much choice as possible about the location and type of housing in which they want to live. In most cases, individuals supported by Housing First wish to live independently in a studio or one bedroom apartment, known as ‘scattered’ housing, meaning they are not in overly close proximity to other Housing First residents and have more chance of integrating into their local community. However, there are cases where some individuals have not wanted to live alone (because of isolation), so supporting people to live with others of their choosing should not be ruled out as an option.

As the only requirement of accessing the service is a willingness to maintain a tenancy, the individual is not obliged to engage with wider health and social care agencies. For this reason, the principles state that the person can choose not to engage with other services so long as they have regular contact with the Housing First team. This does not mean that the support staff do not encourage them to access other services where necessary (see principle 7), but it is not mandatory. The level of contact will depend on the individual though; who chooses when, where and how the support is provided. The amount of support will also flex depending on their needs at different times. Small caseloads allow Housing First workers to vary the levels of support provided.

Finally, individuals have choice and control over what they want to achieve with the support of the Housing First team. The individual takes the lead and is supported to identify and set goals (see principle 6).

### 5. An active engagement approach is used

Unlike most traditional services, the onus around engagement lies with the Housing First team rather than with the individual. The teams are persistent without being intrusive. This usually means meeting the individual in situ in order to offer them Housing First (e.g. on the street, in a day centre), and pro-actively engaging them from this initial contact for as long as is required.

Housing First teams are flexible and creative in how they engage and support people. They aim to tailor and personalise their support to that individual, instead of expecting the person to fit in with set processes of the service. Small caseloads enable the team to provide this pro-active support which is usually face-to-face but other means of communication can be used.

#### Examples of active engagement

Two Housing First schemes for women operate a system where they make regular ‘welfare checks’ each person. **Threshold’s** Housing First Project offers a daily welfare check (including weekends), and the customers have access to an on-call manager 24 hours a day.

Another service manager said “non-engagement is not language we use here. We fund mobile phones for each resident which helps the team remain in contact with them. We operate welfare checks every Friday over the phone and as part of our service arrange a home visit once a week to address any property issues which ensures we have contact with our clients”.

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### 6. The service is based on people's strengths, goals and aspirations

Individuals accessing Housing First are likely to have been provided services for many years based on their needs and risks i.e. the things that are “wrong” with them. Housing First takes a strengths-based approach, supporting individuals to identify their goals, strengths and the knowledge and skills they need to help them achieve their aspirations.

Despite the multitude and complexity of the individuals' support needs, the work of Housing First teams is underpinned by the philosophy that people always have the potential to change positively, improve their health and wellbeing and integrate into society. This positive attitude and belief enables workers, through the trusting relationships they establish, to increase the self-esteem and self-worth of those accessing the service.

### 7. A harm reduction approach is used

The final principle relates to the approach taken to support the individual around their health and wellbeing. Those eligible for Housing First may have any number of health and wellbeing needs, some of which may have been untreated for years.

As discussed above, there is no requirement for the individual to engage with services to address these needs if they do not wish to. However Housing First teams have a duty to ensure they are providing holistic support which encourages individuals to reduce immediate and ongoing harm from drug and/or alcohol use or self-harm. Housing First teams also work to reduce harm and support people to begin recovery in relation to their physical health, mental health and emotional wellbeing.

## Offering Housing First

In most cases the Housing First team will make direct face to face contact with an individual to explain and offer the service. This could be on the street, in a hostel or making contact with them at another service they use e.g. a day centre.

It may be beneficial for existing support services to introduce the person to the team, and where the individual is rough sleeping it is recommended that the Housing First worker and outreach team undertake joint shifts in order to make contact.

People may initially be reluctant or wary to engage or accept the offer. Being proactive in making contact with the person to establish a relationship and provide information is important. If someone categorically refuses the offer, teams should ensure the person knows that it is always available when they want it, and occasionally remind them of this (directly or via existing support services).

### Examples in a service

Some Housing First teams provide written information about the service when introducing themselves to a potential tenant. The concept of Housing First is unusual and completely different to the services previously offered to people. It is useful to provide people with information they can take away and read, empowering them to have a better understanding about the operation of the service and the support on offer. **St Mungo's Hammersmith and Fulham** service has developed a leaflet providing information about their project.

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### Preparing people to move in

Housing First is not just about giving someone a home and hoping for the best. Most teams will work to establish a relationship with the tenant before they move into the property, helping the individual to trust and access the support on offer should a crisis arise.

In many cases, people supported by Housing First will not have had their own tenancy before. The initial contact also gives Housing First workers a chance to inform the individual about their rights and responsibilities as a tenant so that they can decide whether they are ready and willing to maintain a tenancy.

Staff will discuss the duties of paying rent, and other utilities, in addition to the responsibility of being a considerate neighbour. They will also highlight the potential risk factors that could lead someone to losing their accommodation but will make it clear that should this happen, the support to find another home is always there.

The length of time between an individual accepting the service and being given a property will vary depending on the location, and the type of housing preferred and available to the person.

#### Examples in a service

Supporting individuals into their own homes for the first time can throw up many challenges. One Housing First provider in central London has found that the expectations an individual has around property quality and location is vastly different to the reality of what they can afford on benefits. To overcome this, they spend time explaining the Local Housing Allowance challenges and arrange viewings to a range of properties and locations to highlight the differences and enable the person to make an informed decision on where they want to live.

Experiencing isolation is an issue faced by many moving into their own homes for the first time. It is important to discuss this with the individuals before moving them into housing, and to ask them to consider activities and other ways to overcome loneliness.

### Managing risk

Unless a person poses serious risks to themselves or others, in which case statutory agencies and responses would be used, unlike other services, Housing First teams will not overly focus on completing formal risk assessments. Instead, they work to identify and build on a person's strengths, whilst using harm reduction techniques to address behaviours which may be adversely impacting health and wellbeing.

Support workers at **St Mungo's Housing First** service in Camden complete safety and wellbeing plans and support overview plans. This is the only paperwork they complete with the individuals they are supporting. We hope to add template copies of these to our website in due course.

It is important to remember that a Housing First tenant is living in their own home, within a community, and should not be subjected to the same risk assessment and management processes as in other types of

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supported housing. This does not mean however, that Housing First teams won't continually assess and monitor an individual's situation and will work to encourage the individual (with other agencies where relevant) to reduce harm and keep them safe.

Most importantly, it will be necessary to ensure that workers are not at risk. One manager described the use of a 'health and safety boundary'; so if a worker feels or is unsafe or uncomfortable, the issue will be addressed. Their staff work with the residents to adjust their behaviour without placing consequences on it. While most support is provided on a one to one basis, there are circumstances where staff have worked in pairs to provide support in situations where lone working could be harmful.

## Managing disengagement

Due to the long term nature of support provided by Housing First teams, there may be times when an individual requires less support, or disengages entirely from the service. In most cases, the lead worker will have an awareness of the person's pattern of behaviour, and current health and wellbeing needs, and will identify whether their disengagement is of concern or not.

We recommend, where possible, that advance discussions are held to determine the actions the resident would like the support team to take if they are struggling to get hold of them. These actions could vary, and after initial contact attempts could escalate to contacting other agencies the individual engages with, ultimately alerting the emergency services or accessing their property.

In cases where there is no concern about a person's health or safety, it is important to remember that the resident may feel they do not need to access the service. Your role is to ensure they are safe and well, rather than closing the service to them entirely. The flexibility within caseload size should give capacity to manage disengagement or for cases to lie dormant. However, teams occasionally write or call a person to check in with them and remind them support is available if and when they need it.

## Monitoring and evaluation

Monitoring outcomes enables the service to continually reflect upon their work, and to discuss with individuals how far they have progressed. While it is important to monitor outcomes, this must be balanced with the principles of Housing First and should not be a formal process undertaken with the Housing First tenant, as would be the case in traditional supported housing services.

### **Housing First staff say...**

"We don't do any paperwork with our clients. It is all informal but we do record every meeting / appointment / achievement on our organisational database. This helps reinforce the Housing First approach of no formal expectations and a move away from a hostel-based working style."

"Due to the different approach, our commissioners expect us to report on different outcomes to the other services in the pathway. Along with quarterly reports submitted to commissioners, I send monthly updates on the individuals we are working with."

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“Our quarterly reports to commissioners generally include an update on each person and statistics about how often we have engaged with them, whether they’ve accessed any services or appointments and any other things they are doing. We’ve also compiled very simple client feedback surveys to present to our commissioners. At milestone marks e.g. 6 and 12 months, we have included case studies which tend to show outcomes in a strengths based style, without the need for formalised paperwork. It means you can include direct quotes and their ideas/suggestions which I think is what Housing First is all about!”

The evidence base for Housing First provides information on outcomes in three domains; tenancy sustainment, health and wellbeing, and community and financial integration. It may also be useful to collect information about an individual’s support needs and service use (e.g. contact with health and criminal justice services) before they access the Housing First service, so that comparisons can be made, and the impact of the new support assessed.

We will provide further information on what, and how, outcomes are measured by Housing First teams in England. It seems that most teams do not use any formal support planning tools, as this process has not usually worked for individuals in the past. Instead the teams will monitor soft outcomes with no expected timeframes of when an individual will achieve their goals.

For this reason it is also important to ensure that funding requirements do not begin to influence the support offered to the individual. Making sure that your funders are fully aware of the principles and purpose of Housing First will be important. Qualitative reporting will be as important as reporting on quantitative data collected.

You may also wish to collect and monitor information you consider to be useful in order to make a business case to future funders of the service. Asking potential funders (e.g. from health or criminal justice sectors) what information is needed will help you to build this into your monitoring at the start of service delivery. The range of tools used to measure these outcomes vary and we hope to recommend some easy to use, and helpful, methods of collecting data over the course our project.

Finally, because Housing First is innovative and fairly new, many services have gained funding for an independent evaluation in order to understand and demonstrate the efficacy of their work. You may wish to consider undertaking an external evaluation and look at others as we add them to our website.

**Project 360** in Preston struggles to collect quantitative information, so measures outcomes through qualitative data. The use of case studies, feedback and paperwork to discuss goals and achievements for the future has helped staff to engage the residents and develop a trusting and informed support offering that is led by the individual. It creates a fluid and interchanging process depending on the tenant’s current circumstances, needs and wishes. This also means that workers can respond appropriately to crises.

## Multi-agency partnerships

We recommend that, where possible, support providers build or strengthen partnership working across the statutory and voluntary sector when establishing a Housing First service. An understanding and flexibility



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across all agencies will benefit the Housing First tenants in the long term. It may be beneficial to provide information or training about Housing First to other agencies in your area.

The MEAM approach is a useful framework which can be adopted by local areas to increase coordination and flexibility within service systems for people facing multiple disadvantage needs: <http://meam.org.uk/the-meam-approach/>

### **CASE STUDY: Cambridge MEAM Housing First**

Cambridgeshire became a Making Every Adult Matter (MEAM) pilot area in 2011. A vulnerable street homeless person was taken onto the caseload and it was agreed that she would be offered a flat from a local registered provider. After a long period of homelessness, she signed an assured shorthold tenancy and moved directly from the street into her new home.

They called this provision a 'training flat' to distinguish it from the wider general needs housing entry criteria. Rather than having to achieve a certain priority status, and then bidding until successful, individuals move in directly and are supported to maintain a tenancy. They can remain in social housing as long as they are able to maintain the tenancy.

Instead of providing intensive case management, the primary method of support for this individual was to co-ordinate existing services to ensure that her needs were met. Where gaps in provision were identified, the MEAM co-ordinator encouraged service flexibility to bridge them. The approach was successful and has been offered to others receiving MEAM service.

#### *Eligibility process*

When a vacancy becomes available for a training flat, a candidate is selected by a multi-agency group consisting of local statutory and voluntary sector partners. The group, which oversees the operational work in Cambridgeshire, includes the Police, Probation, Mental Health, Housing, Adult Social Care, Domestic Violence, Drug & Alcohol, and accommodation providers. The group will discuss the following:

The accommodation should be:

- ✓ Available or about to become vacant
- ✓ Appropriate for the needs of the individual

The potential tenant should:

- ✓ Be willing to accept an appropriate package of support (this may be extremely light touch)
- ✓ Be vulnerably accommodated (rough sleeping, friend's floors or other temporary accommodation)
- ✓ Not ordinarily be considered for housing due to perceived risk
- ✓ Have demonstrated reasonable engagement with Cambridgeshire's MEAM service or other services (the threshold for this is quite low, answering the phone from time to time or taking some action towards being accommodated would be reasonable)
- ✓ Have found difficulty in negotiating the usual housing pathways. For example, they may have difficulty in managing shared accommodation, or providers may perceive the risk to be too great to accommodate.

The operational group selects the eligible individual whose need is highest. The offer is unconditional, excepting the terms of a tenancy agreement. Additional conditions may be added, in consultation with the potential tenant, if all parties believe that it will enhance the offer and add to the support.



### *Coordinating the support*

The individual receives help to identify the support they might need to help them maintain their tenancy. The MEAM co-ordinator, who is likely to have a good knowledge of the person already, will assemble all the services and hold a pre-signup meeting to agree each agency's responsibilities and establish a uniform approach. The prospective tenant will be involved with this process, which ensures all services commit to, and are accountable for, providing support.

### *Monitoring success*

Follow up meetings, either actual or virtual, take place periodically as required to review the following:

1. Has the individual benefitted from the accommodation?
2. Have they managed / maintained the tenancy?
3. Have there been any significant issues in the wider community?

The landlord of the training flat is involved in the process throughout. This gives them reassurance to accommodate other people with "higher needs", as well as a direct point of contact if there are any issues that they need support with.

### *Longer term housing and support*

After 6 months, the end of the assured shorthold period, a review of the individual's progress in the training flat takes place involving them, the MEAM co-ordinator, the landlord and other relevant members of their support network. Assuming they have managed and benefitted from the tenancy and not been an 'unreasonable' neighbour, the co-ordinator will begin to work on a greater permanence for the tenant. Usually this will involve an application to a City Council panel who have the ability to award an 'A' priority for permanent social housing.

On one occasion, the tenancy was converted to an assured tenancy and the person remained in the same location. This is not common due to the lack of availability of flats for this use locally, and it then took some time before another flat could be identified, meaning another person could not be offered the opportunity in the meantime. If it is felt that the tenant could benefit from a further period in the training flat, then the period can be extended to 12 months.

Even if a tenancy has been successful, the process of resettlement can take a significant time due to the demand on housing in the social sector, so it is not uncommon for tenants to still be in the flat up to two years later; longer on occasion. When a move to permanent social housing is secured, the support that has made the tenancy successful can still be accessed by the individual. This may include additional support that has been identified during the period in the training flat.

# Sourcing housing

The type of housing offered depends on what is available to the organisation and the housing market in that area. In the majority of cases, individuals have scattered site, independent tenancies, although there are some cases in which shared housing is used. Around 50% of Housing First projects in England currently use social housing, the other half use private rented sector (PRS) housing.

Accommodation should be sourced for an individual based on its cost, quality, suitability and location. Within the operational context, an individual should have as much choice as possible in where they live, and who they live with. All individuals supported by Housing First are entitled to Housing Benefit which covers the majority, or all, of their rental costs. People should not be placed in properties which are of a poor quality or in areas that could jeopardise their ability to sustain a tenancy.

## Social Housing

Social Housing is not only affordable but is also more stable than accommodation obtained through private rental markets. We are working strategically to increase access to social housing for Housing First, but have identified three mechanisms in which social housing can be accessed:

### 1. Allocations made through the local authority

The local authority may provide a certain number of general needs allocations to the project or may allocate a social housing tenancy on an individual basis. Conversations will need to be held internally within local authorities to ensure all relevant departments (e.g. Housing Options, Housing Allocations and Housing Benefit) are aware of the principles and intent of Housing First, and where possible offer some level of flexibility. Being transparent about the service is important for building trust and familiarising all partners with the aims and potential issues.

### 2. Service level agreements within a Housing Association between their general needs housing department and supported housing service (which is providing Housing First)

There are some examples where a supported housing arm of a Housing Association, with experience of working with similar client groups, have established a Housing First service and agreed access to the general needs stock provided by the wider Housing Association. Service Level Agreements ensure that roles and responsibilities relating to housing management are understood by those involved, and that there is continued separation of housing and support.

### 3. Partnerships between Housing First teams and registered providers (pilots in process)

We are recommending that support providers make contact with local housing associations in their area as, where this has happened, most partnerships have proven to be successful. You could arrange individual meetings, or hold a workshop on Housing First asking social landlords to get involved with your project. As the number of properties needed in each locality is small, the commitment from social landlords is limited yet there are benefits to them of getting involved.

## Homeless Link

We are working to identify good practice around partnerships between social landlords and support providers and will share learning via our website. Resources, including a promotional video and guidance for social housing providers can be found at <http://hfe.homeless.org.uk/resource/guidance-toolkits>.

## Private Rented Sector

Conditions such as Local Housing Allowance, average market rents and competing tenants (e.g. University students) impact how easy it can be to source private rented sector housing in a specific area. In London and the South East, the quality of PRS housing affordable to people on benefits can be very poor. Yet despite this, Housing First teams have been able to source housing from the PRS and overcome any challenges, so it should not be ruled out as an accommodation option.

We have worked with Crisis to develop specific guidance for using PRS for Housing First which will be added to our website when complete.

### **CASE STUDY: Housing First in shared housing**

Project 360, provided by The Foxton Centre in Preston, uses a Housing First approach in shared homes. Tenants are provided with personalised support to sustain the tenancy and keep it safe, and to learn to live independently.

#### *How people are supported*

The project works on a person-centred, strengths-based approach. Importantly, workers enable tenants to be honest without the fear of being judged or penalised.

The project expectations and support available is made clear to prospective tenants from the initial assessment; if a tenant does not feel that the project will work for them, they can decline the offer without feeling that they have “failed” or that they can no longer access other forms of support to solve their homelessness. Each tenant is assessed based on their situation on entering the property; this is non-prescriptive and recognises individual strengths and areas that require additional support.

A clean, good standard property with all basic amenities and furniture is offered. All bills are issued in the tenants' names so that they are responsible for their tenancies and they together to come up with a plan for payments, with some support from the Housing First team.

Peer mentoring, inclusive opportunities for volunteering on other projects, consistent house meetings and one-to-ones with key workers – while still having flexibility and autonomy over their own tenancy – has ensured success and prevented further homelessness.

#### *The challenges of shared homes*

Multi-occupancy has created challenges in relation to developing negotiation skills, matching personalities together within the properties, and developing living skills without individuals feeling patronised, controlled or deskilled in the process.

## Homeless Link

The primary difficulty has been supporting individual tenants to recognise and understand another person's situation and difficulties in learning basic living skills, particularly as tenants more competent in these skills may become disgruntled. At the same time, the confidentiality and dignity of each tenant has to be maintained. However, this has also been an opportunity to support tenants in negotiation skills and peer mentoring, as a natural progression within the project. Tenants have responded well to this focus on a strengths based approach, supporting other tenants practically and emotional.

Another significant challenge has been the pressures on staff time when incidents have occurred such as unplanned exits, moving new tenants in and concerns of risk taking behaviours at the properties. To manage this, the Housing First team focus on preventing unplanned exits and managing risk between tenants (rather than on service user interaction). A co-ordinated approach is implemented across other project teams, including outreach services and the organisation's women's service that specialises in working with street based sex workers. This supports the core staff team to deal with crisis situations in a more manageable manner.

### *Working with men and women in shared homes*

Female tenants have proven to be more complex than their male counterparts, and initially require more staff support time to settle in and develop an open and honest dialogue around their drug use and risk taking behaviours. There have been a greater number of cases of harassment and subtle intimidation of female tenants by other female tenants, and more instances of tenancy abandonment than in the male shared home. Non-tenants harassing / threatening, rekindling of former / new romantic relationships, and prioritising substance misuse / criminal activity have also put women's tenancies at risk.

## Housing Management

Many Housing First support teams undertake some housing management tasks which can help to promote the service to social and private landlords. This includes ensuring rent payments are set up and maintained, checking the property for maintenance and other issues and being a point of contact for initial complaints. It is important for teams to establish a good relationship with the landlord / housing officer and clear protocols around the parameters of each other's roles and how you will work together, and to have good communication.

### Additional costs relating to housing

You will need agreements with partner agencies (e.g. the local authority), or capacity within your budget, to cover costs additional costs that will support the individual to access and sustain a tenancy. We recommend that this is written into funding contracts.

Costs may include:

- Tenancy deposits or bonds
- Personal budgets to furnish homes
- Money to cover utility payments in emergencies
- Money for repairs in specific circumstances

## Homeless Link

### Personal budgets and bond schemes

Some Housing First contracts include money for personal budgets. If you are seeking or bidding for funding we recommend that you include personal budgets in your proposal as these can greatly assist engagement, tenancy sustainment and supporting the individual to achieve their goals.

**Camden Housing First** offers generous personal budgets of £1,500 for the first year, and £1,000 for the second year, that a person is engaged with their team. The personal budgets are used to purchase items for the tenant's new home, but can also be used for meaningful activities such as camping, buying a laptop or going to watch the football. In some cases, an individual may use their budget to meet their basic needs if their benefits have been stopped. Within reason, the service allows an individual to take the lead on how their budget is spent.

# Building the team

This section should help you to build an effective team for your Housing First service. The approach may be considerably different to the way in which practitioners have worked previously.

The trusting relationship established between the staff member and the individual being supported is key to that person engaging with the service, accepting support when needed and considering making positive changes to other aspects of their life. In the same vein, a trusting relationship between frontline staff and their manager is vital for retaining staff and supporting them to feel safe and empowered in a role that can present unique opportunities and challenges.

### One Housing First manager said...

“The main role of the manager is to support the staff to effectively work with their caseload. Because, compared to traditional services, the support is less structured and process driven, this means helping the staff to find the right structure for each person.

“Staff with a great deal of experience and confidence are ideal. You need staff who can be resilient. The relationship is so key and so intense.

“The type of support and approach used by staff differs depending on where the individual they’re supporting is on their journey away from homelessness. In the initial period where the relationship is being established and the individual is moving from the street into their home, whilst adhering to professional boundaries, the staff are more ‘giving’ of resources and time as they attempt to engage the individual and build a trusting relationship.

“Over time, as the individual becomes more familiar with the staff member, they may begin to push or test the boundaries due to expectations of rejection, abandonment or because of an inherent pattern of behaviours in relationships. It is important for the manager to be aware of this and its impact on the team member.

“Due to the nature of Housing First, boundaries will need to be flexible and less rigid ensuring that the power balance is equal within the support relationship.”

## Assertive Community Treatment vs. Intensive Case Management teams

Internationally, there are two types of teams providing support to people accommodated using the Housing First approach:

- **Assertive Community Treatment (ACT)**

ACT teams are multi-disciplinary and tend to be used in areas where access to wider mainstream support (e.g. health and social care services) is limited. This is particularly relevant in the United States where the ‘welfare state’ is minimal.

## Homeless Link

- **Intensive Case Management (ICM)**

ICM teams look like an intensive floating support service and are found in areas where there is wider support provision. ICM teams act as navigators, supporting their beneficiaries to access and engage with existing mainstream services (when the client is ready). ICM is the model most commonly used in the UK; due to the range of other public services available there is less need, and funding, to provide the ACT model. We are aware of only one example in England of a new service that will have some multi-disciplinary support within their Housing First team.

This guidance is written based on the ICM team model. However, as Housing First in the UK is still relatively new we may see some areas begin to adopt an ACT-like structure – particularly in more rural areas where mainstream services are geographically more difficult to access.

## Funding the service

The majority of Housing First services in England are funded through local authority grants. There are some examples where other sources of funding are used, including from public health, clinical commissioning groups, police and crime commissioners and trusts and foundations. In 2016, the Department for Communities and Local Government announced that eight areas of the country would receive funding to deliver Housing First through Social Impact Bonds.

Providing open-ended support is a challenging proposition in a climate where funding contracts tend to have a short life span. Over the course of the Housing First England project we will work strategically to increase funding opportunities for Housing First and address some of the systematic barriers.

Many Housing First services begin as pilots and go on to receive longer funding contracts.

**Camden and Newcastle local authorities** piloted Housing First and, due to successful outcomes, committed to funding services on a longer term basis, including Housing First within the range of options available to homeless people in those areas.

Housing First is about being creative and doing things differently. Agencies wishing to provide a Housing First service should not be fearful of considering non-traditional income streams. There is a growing interest in Housing First from non-governmental funders.

## Additional costs to consider

Any funding bid needs to factor in additional costs to enable the service to run smoothly and for the tenants to have the best chance of sustaining their tenancies. Many Housing First services have financial capacity for:

- Staff travel – this can be costly if tenancies are dispersed across a large area
- Money for engagement activities e.g. coffees, food etc..
- Personal budgets for tenants to purchase items they need before being housed (e.g. a mobile phone, identity documents) and for their new home
- Money for rent deposits or bonds
- Additional money for when things go wrong such as damage to properties or when the electric runs out

## Homeless Link

### On-call systems

Many Housing First teams operate a duty on-call system. Whilst use of this may be low, it can be a reassurance to all of those involved; tenants, landlords, housing officers and neighbours. You may wish to factor this in when designing the service and review where necessary.

### Team structure

Housing First teams need a dedicated manager or team leader. This person may also provide case management to a small number of tenants.

When considering team structure, it is important to ensure that this is designed in line with the principles and recommended caseload; one support worker to every five to seven residents. To reduce people becoming over-dependent on their worker, the teams may like to operate a lead / secondary worker structure.

Depending on the funding available and number of individuals your team will be able to work with, you may wish to consider employing specialist workers to enable the team to be more efficient in certain areas of the work. For example, a dedicated Private Rented Sector officer or a peer volunteers coordinator.

**SHP's Fulfilling Lives team** in Islington and Camden (FLIC) have been successfully using the Housing First approach. The team have a dedicated Private Rented Sector officer who undertakes all activities relating to the accommodation and housing management. This includes sourcing the properties, liaising with letting agents and landlords and supporting the new tenant to understand their tenancy agreement. FLIC's frontline Link Worker team leads on the ongoing intensive holistic support to the clients, in conjunction with the Private Rented Sector officer.

### Recruiting the team

Getting the right manager and staff in place is absolutely vital to making your Housing First service successful. It is recommended that salaries reflect the flexibility, innovation and lone-working required in a Housing First service, to ensure a high calibre of applicant is recruited and retained.

Years of experience in working with the client group is not always necessary, and in fact may not be beneficial if a person's perception and practice in how traditional services operate is ingrained. During recruitment, organisations should look for evidence of a belief that people can change regardless of their needs, an awareness of the importance of person-centred services and a willingness to work flexibly and creatively. You may also wish to recruit staff with specialisms (e.g. previous experience in the mental health or substance misuse sectors).

We recommend that Housing First workers have some experience and resilience to assist them in the role. We will provide example job descriptions on our website along with information about the skills and training beneficial to those working in Housing First services.



## Homeless Link

### Involving those with lived experience

Recruiting applicants with lived experience, or providing opportunities for peer mentoring on a voluntary basis, can greatly improve the engagement between an individual and the service. Many Housing First teams have paid or voluntary roles for people who have been homeless or who have related experiences.

**Inspiring Change Manchester** relies on people with lived experience to provide peer mentoring and support to their Housing First tenants. This includes peers – people with their own experiences of homelessness – building up relationships with Housing First tenants, helping to understand what support they may be looking for to make a success of their tenancy.

Peers help Housing First tenants build links with local community services, helping them to feel settled in their home by connecting in with local activities and support groups. This helps build a community support network - something that many of us take for granted - but can be difficult for those who have experienced years of homelessness and who run the risk of social isolation.

Peers also offer personal support and advice, using their own experiences to help motivate and encourage individuals to maintain their own tenancy and engage in wider support services. This forms a vital part of connecting people in with support circles and helping build relationships which turn a place to live into a home.

### Training and support for staff

It is important to ensure all staff are aware of the key principles of Housing First and are offered training that can help them to practically apply these principles. Training can also help staff to effectively understand, engage and support their caseload to make positive changes.

Due to the similarity in underlying philosophies and intended cohort, trauma and psychologically informed approaches may be adopted by the team to improve the support provided to tenants and staff. Along with regular supervision and case management meetings, the team will benefit from reflective practice.

*“Reflective practice is important to enable staff to know how to manage responses and hold the boundary whilst keeping the flexibility for optimal engagement” (Housing First manager).*

### CASE STUDY: Reflective practice in action

The Camden Housing First team spent several sessions of reflective practice discussing their client Sam who, instead of staying in his flat, started sleeping rough again. During this time, he disengaged with his drug service, and script, and started selling the Big Issue again. He stopped taking medication for his psychological and physical health and quite quickly adjusted to being back on the street; developing a network of people that assisted him.

Simultaneously, Sam became increasingly disengaged with the Housing First team and support on offer – assistance to return to his flat, resolve related issues and re-engage with treatment services. His drug and alcohol use increased, his physical and mental health deteriorated, and he lost interest in the goals he had been working towards (e.g. volunteering). Sam was uninterested in returning to his flat and felt his needs were being better met where he was. He stated that he didn't have the independent living skills necessary to manage a tenancy and that he would prefer to move back into a hostel.

## Homeless Link

The team's goals for Sam – living in his flat, addressing his physical and mental health, engaging with support around his substance use – were opposite to his own goals. They became increasingly concerned and frustrated as Sam presented himself to others as someone without housing that had been abandoned by the team. He was being doted on by the local community with attention, money and food, and newspaper articles were written about his 'situation'.

The team was focussed on finding practical solutions to encourage Sam back to his home. However, through reflective practice they began to understand that the comfort and attention Sam was getting while rough sleeping and selling the Big Issue was motivating him to continue this behaviour. Based on his presentation, the reflective practice facilitator suggested Sam may have histrionic personality disorder which includes symptoms like:

- Exhibitionist behavior
- Excessive sensitivity to criticism or disapproval
- Pride of own personality and unwillingness to change, viewing any change as a threat
- Using somatic symptoms (of physical illness) to garner attention
- A need to be the centre of attention
- Low tolerance for frustration or delayed gratification
- Blaming personal failures or disappointments on others

The potential diagnosis fitted the team's experience of Sam. Through reflective practice they were able to discuss different ways to work with him, including reducing the amount of time that was spent on the distracting practical issues Sam continually wanted to discuss.

"We were non-directive regarding Sam's return to his flat and ensured that we treated his perspective as valid. This new perspective also led to a greater understanding of how Sam relates to us and we reflected that our relationship with him was more superficial than we had initially realised and that this is due to his difficulties in establishing deeper connections with people. This has helped us to respond to Sam on less of a surface level."

Sam has now returned to his flat and is engaging with services again. He has reduced his use of drugs and alcohol, is back on his script and his health has stabilised. The team feel that reflective practice sessions were invaluable in enabling them to develop a different understanding of Sam, and to subsequently take a different approach in how they engaged and supported him.

## Further Information

More Housing First resources can be found on the [Housing First England website](#), and these will be developed and added to over the course of the project. Please sign up to our newsletter to be first to hear about opportunities to meet other members of the Housing First network, regional and national events and the publication of new resources.

If you feel we have missed something important from this guidance, please get in touch so that we can understand current practice and update our information: [joanne.prestidge@homelesslink.org.uk](mailto:joanne.prestidge@homelesslink.org.uk).



## What we do

Homeless Link is the national membership charity for organisations working directly with people who become homeless or who live with multiple and complex support needs. We work to improve services and campaign for policy change that will help end homelessness.

## Let's end homelessness together

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