

Housing First England



homeless link



 A guide for people who are offered

Housing First

The purpose of this guide

This guide has been made for people who are offered Housing First support. It aims to explain what this is and what your rights and responsibilities would be if you become a Housing First resident and take on a tenancy.



What is Housing First?

Housing First is a service that offers you support to find and stay in your own home. It is based on the idea that getting you into a property comes first and that other things you need once you're in your home – such as help managing your money, support for your mental and physical health – are provided when you need them and only if you want them.

The only thing you really need to do is make sure you understand your role as a tenant.

Housing First has been used in the UK since around 2009 and is becoming popular because it works so well.



How can it help?

Housing First is being offered to people that may find living in hostels or other types of supported accommodation difficult. Because high quality support is available as part of the service, it is also positive for people who have not had their own tenancy before, or have struggled with one in the past.

If you access Housing First, it will give you stability from which you can plan a healthier and happier future. You will not be expected to do anything other than stick to your tenancy agreement. This means you choose your own goals.



How does it work?

Housing First is an offer of a home with support available to help you keep it, for as long as you need. Housing First should follow seven key principles:



1. People have a right to a home

You will not have to prove that you are ready for your own property – you just need to be willing to try. The homes available to you will depend on the housing market in your local area. The Housing First team will explain more about this.



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

Your support worker and their team will support you when you want them to, and for as long as you need them to.





3. Housing and support are separate

If you don't want to have support you will not lose your tenancy. Equally, whatever happens with your tenancy, your support team will continue to work with you, including finding you another tenancy if required.



4. Individuals have choice and control

You will choose your goals and decide what support you want in order to achieve them. You will choose where you want to live (as long as the property is suitable and affordable). If you don't want to live alone, you can decide who you want to live with.



5. An assertive engagement approach is used

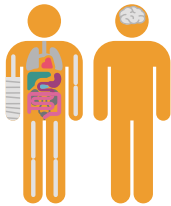
Your Housing First support team are responsible for making sure you receive the support you want. This means that if you are unable to access the support, or are having difficulties, they need to work in a way that suits you. It means that their offer of support won't disappear if you have a wobble or don't want to see them for a while.





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

You'll focus on what's right instead of what's wrong. You can choose what to share with your support worker and when you share it. Rather than having to answer questions about your history, over time they will talk to you about what you're good at, what you'd like to do with your time and what you'd like in the future.



7. A harm reduction approach is used

Your support team will help you to identify ways you might be able to reduce any harm you are experiencing. This might involve supporting you to use drugs or alcohol less or more safely, as you feel more comfortable in your new home. It may involve improving your physical and mental wellbeing. This will be led by you, and your support team will not judge your decisions but will help you keep yourself safe.



Taking on a tenancy

A tenancy is a legally binding contract between you (the tenant) and the landlord. The contract means that both you and the landlord have rights and responsibilities. As a tenant:

Your *rights* will be:

- ✓ Your landlord is responsible for repairing and maintaining the structure and exterior of the property (e.g. roof, windows, ceiling) and for ensuring the equipment supplying gas, electric and water is working and safe. Your property should be in a good condition.
- ✓ The landlord must give you reasonable notice, and arrange a suitable time, if they need to enter your property to carry out repairs or an inspection (property inspections are normal procedure).
- ✓ The landlord should install a smoke alarm on each floor of the property.

Top tip

If the landlord does not meet their responsibilities you should speak to your support worker.



- ✓ You have a right to enjoy your home undisturbed. The landlord should not enter your home without permission.
- ✓ The landlord must follow eviction rules. This means if they want you to leave they must give you written notice, and a court order, before getting a third party to evict you. Housing First tenants are not evicted often but your worker will support you if eviction becomes a possibility.
- ✓ If a deposit needs to be paid, this should be protected by a Tenancy Deposit Scheme until the end of the tenancy.

Your *responsibilities* will be:

- ✓ To ensure the rent is paid to the landlord on time. This will mean ensuring that your benefit claim is maintained to prevent payments from being delayed or cancelled. Many residents supported by Housing First services ask the council to pay rent directly to the landlord. Your support worker will offer help around all of this. You should still pay rent even if you are waiting for the landlord to undertake repairs or if you are in dispute with them.
- ✓ As a tenant you will most likely be responsible for paying for property utilities (gas, electric, water, TV license, internet) and the council tax. If you receive benefits you may be entitled to support with your council tax. There are a range of other payment plans for the other utilities to help you budget for them. The Housing First team can let you know more.



- ✓ You must let the landlord access the property for inspection and repairs once they have given you notice.
- ✓ You are responsible for keeping the property in a good condition and paying for any damage caused by you, your family or friends. You need to ensure that the way you live will not cause risks to the health and safety of you and your neighbours.
- ✓ You are not allowed to sublet the property to anyone else.
- ✓ You are responsible for ensuring there is no anti-social behaviour at your property. This means being respectful of your neighbours; for example keeping noise down. Your neighbours should also be respectful to you.
- ✓ You must give notice, in line with the tenancy agreement, if you want to leave the property. You can risk building up owed rent if you just leave without notifying anyone.



Top tip

Make sure you have read and that you understand the full tenancy agreement for the property you are in, just in case there are some bits that aren't in the list above. Your support worker can help you do this. The landlord can take steps to evict you if you do not meet your responsibilities.



Learning from Housing First residents

Housing First services and residents across England have shared some other advice which may be useful to you in making a decision to accept support and housing through Housing First.



Ask for help

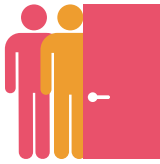
Some people can find having their own home a bit daunting so make sure you contact your support worker if you need support – it's what they are there for!



Don't become isolated

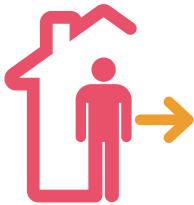
Some people can feel quite isolated in their tenancy – especially if they are used to having other people around. Have a think about how you might feel and the steps you can take to manage this or ask for advice from your support worker.





Having friends round

Many people want, or feel obliged, to invite their friends to stay in their new home. However, this can add to feelings of isolation and guilt if friends are still homeless, and can sometimes lead to problems occurring with the tenancy such as anti-social behaviour, problems with neighbours or tenancies being taken over. Although you will be free to have visitors, please be aware of this. Some people choose not to tell their friends where they are moving to in order to avoid potential problems.



A new home is just the start

It's important to see getting a property as the start of your Housing First journey. Moving into a new home can be exciting and will give you stability, but it can also cause other feelings to surface. Your support team will help you to adjust, as well as offering support so that over time you will find things to do with your time, get to know the local area and meet new people.





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