



**Housing  
First  
England**

An introduction for  
**Social landlords**

# Housing First

## An Introduction for Social Landlords

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Produced by Homeless Link, with thanks to the many organisations who contributed.

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## Introduction

### Call to Social Landlords

Housing First is an approach that is evidenced to successfully support people with repeat histories of homelessness, who experience complex disadvantages, into settled accommodation. Research shows that 70-90% of Housing First residents maintain their accommodation, and go on to improve other aspects of their lives. The approach is popular internationally, and is an important part of the solution to ending homelessness.

Since we first published this guidance in 2017, the Housing First movement in England has grown. Recent research shows a six-fold increase in capacity over the past three years, with 87 Housing First services supporting 2,000 people. This expansion of services has also seen an increase in the support for Housing First from Social Landlords, with 81% of services using social housing.

Despite this excellent progress, there is more to be done - research by Homeless Link and Crisis estimates that 16,500 Housing First tenancies are needed to end the cycle of homelessness for everyone experiencing multiple disadvantage in England. Our [campaign to scale up Housing First](#) is backed by a wide range of Social Landlords, who play a key role in delivering this vital intervention to those in the greatest need.

This guidance outlines the ways in which Social Landlords can get involved, answering some common questions and providing information about the advantages you can secure from the Housing First model. It includes links to webinars and research where you can hear first-hand from the Social Landlords who are part of making Housing First such a success.

We hope you will join the movement, and look forward to working with you.

### 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 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 or [sign up to our newsletter](#) for updates.

# What is Housing First?

Housing First is the most evidenced and cost effective housing intervention for people with long histories of homelessness, and entrenched health and wellbeing support needs. The concept of Housing First was developed in North America, but over the last decade has grown in popularity across Canada and Europe. The Scottish Government embedded Housing First in its Rapid Rehousing Transition Plans, while in England the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government funded pilots via Combined Authorities in the West Midlands, Liverpool City Region and Greater Manchester.<sup>12</sup> International evidence indicates that 70-90% of Housing First residents maintain their accommodation, and make progress in other areas of their lives.

Unlike traditional homelessness models, which require individuals to progress through a series of accommodation and treatment services until they are 'housing ready', Housing First provides a permanent offer of independent, stable housing with intensive, person-centred support to enable that person to remain housed and begin recovery. The only condition placed on the individual is a willingness to sustain a tenancy. Housing First also differs from other floating and tenancy support approaches due to caseload size, with workers supporting no more than five to seven tenants. This allows a far greater intensity of support than traditional services, with workers sometimes spending time with a tenant every day, as well as being highly flexible to respond to problems. In most cases, support workers start meeting clients before they choose a property, so this relationship of trust is in place before the tenancy begins.

Critically, the Housing First approach, or philosophy, is underpinned by a [set of principles](#), which have been shown to ensure success. Services with a high fidelity to the principles will consequently achieve the best outcomes possible.

## Need for Housing First

Housing First is needed in all areas of the country in which existing services do not offer effective support to individuals experiencing multiple disadvantages. While provision tends to be found in metropolitan areas with high levels of rough sleeping, projects are increasingly opening in more diverse locations. For example, the South West went from having no services in 2017 to 13 Housing First services in 2020.<sup>3</sup> Currently, 81% of Housing First projects have access to social housing, suggesting that partnerships with Social Landlords are a key element to expanding provision to new areas. Many schemes are on a small scale to meet local need, with the majority of services supporting between six and 20 individuals.

The individuals supported are likely to have long histories of homelessness and unemployment, contact with the criminal justice system and problematic substance use. They may also experience poor mental or psychological health and other physical health conditions. Experience of trauma and being at risk of domestic violence is not uncommon. The entrenched nature of these problems can make it difficult for traditional services to support individuals to become more independent – particularly with the conditions they place upon people.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://homelessnetwork.scot/housing-first/know-how/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/housing-secretary-james-brokenshire-awards-funding-to-reduce-rough-sleeping>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.homeless.org.uk/connect/blogs/2020/dec/03/new-research-reveals-scale-of-expansion-of-housing-first>

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Individuals who meet Housing First criteria rarely meet the criteria for their local authority social housing. Despite their support needs, they may not be considered a priority under housing legislation. In some cases, an individual may have had a social tenancy previously but lost it, and have been assessed as intentionally homeless as a result. There may also be concerns that they could not maintain a tenancy, and so should start to address their problems before being offered one. Homelessness pathways may require an individual to move from shelter to hostel to supported housing - the 'staircase' model of extended stays in rules-based, communal settings - before they have a chance of being offered their own home.

Housing First offers an alternative solution for this cohort, providing permanent housing as a platform from which an individual can find safety and begin recovery. Involvement in Housing First provision therefore requires flexibility and a slightly different way of operating in order to break the cycle of homelessness.

## Scale of Housing First

Housing First is not a panacea and will not be the best solution for all people who become homeless. For example, in Scotland Housing First is one model within a wider Rapid Rehousing approach.<sup>4,5</sup> The aim of the [Housing First England](#) project is to promote Housing First as the solution for people experiencing complex disadvantages that existing services have been unable to support effectively.

The numbers supported by Housing First in England presently are relatively small. Homeless Link and Crisis assess that 16,500 tenancies are needed, while current provision is closer to 2,000 tenancies. As the majority of services support between six and 20 people, the number of homes required tends to be low in any given area. Many areas also use multiple housing providers, so the number of units provided by any one landlord is typically small. However, supply is not meeting demand within existing Housing First services and stock is needed across the country to ensure the approach is available to this cohort as needed, regardless of location.

The 'Picture of Housing First' research, published in December 2020, reviewed responses from 87 services supporting 1,995 people.<sup>6</sup> While there are some services operating at a larger scale (the three MHCLG funded pilots in the Combined Authority areas of the West Midlands, Greater Manchester and Liverpool City Region are supporting over 100 people each), 75% of Housing First services house no more than 20 people each. Due to the limits on caseload size, Housing First services can only expand where funding for additional staff is secured or when tenants graduate from or leave the service and become 'dormant' or 'closed' cases. However, despite 45% of services being in operation for over two years, the number of people graduating or leaving remains small - and the Housing First principle of open-ended support means that people must always be able to return to Housing First if their need for support increases.

There is also the potential for Housing First to be offered to people who may not be accessing traditional homelessness services but are in contact with the criminal justice sector and health services. It is estimated that there are 58,000 people in the UK experiencing multiple and complex disadvantages. So, while the current scale of Housing First is relatively small, the possibilities for it are great. The approach is already being used for specific cohorts, for example with women and young people.

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<sup>4</sup> <https://homelessnetwork.scot/rapid-rehousing/>

<sup>5</sup> [www.youtube.com/watch?v=gqXevFSCk0&feature=youtu.be](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gqXevFSCk0&feature=youtu.be)

<sup>6</sup> [www.homeless.org.uk/connect/blogs/2020/dec/03/new-research-reveals-scale-of-expansion-of-housing-first](http://www.homeless.org.uk/connect/blogs/2020/dec/03/new-research-reveals-scale-of-expansion-of-housing-first)

### Cost of Housing First

#### Accommodation costs

Rent is usually covered by Housing Benefit or Universal Credit, with any top-up or service charges being paid directly by the tenant. The tenant is also responsible for any utility bills. Specified Accommodation Status (Exempt Accommodation) rates should not be used for Housing First. This is because the tenancy has to remain separate from any support offer and the tenant needs to be able to afford the rent if they graduate from the support service.<sup>7</sup>

#### Support costs

Homeless Link's Picture of Housing First research (2020) showed that around two thirds of Housing First services are funded through local authorities (RSI or homelessness grant). In a small number of cases, funding has also come from Public Health (4%), Clinical Commissioning Groups (6%) and Police and Crime Commissioners (3%). Some Housing First services do not receive statutory funding and are instead funded by trusts and foundations (16%).

Housing First contracts usually incorporate funding for additional costs related to the use of this approach. These include personal budgets (to enable the tenant to furnish and personalise their home, and to take part in hobbies and activities) and staff travel.

### Advantages to tenants

The international evidence base for Housing First is vast and robust. Regardless of the context or method of the research, the outcome trend is the same. More information about the efficacy of Housing First can be found on [our website](#) but in general:

- around 70-90% of people sustain their tenancy
- many see improvements in mental and physical wellbeing
- drug and alcohol use does not get worse
- there are reductions in anti-social behaviours and contact with the criminal justice system
- there is more effective contact with other services

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<sup>7</sup> For further details see Appendix 2:

<https://hfe.homeless.org.uk/sites/default/files/attachments/Social%20landlords%20and%20Housing%20First.pdf>

# Addressing Key Concerns for Social Landlords

Housing First is hugely beneficial to people who are homeless and also benefits social housing providers. In this section, we explore a number of concerns raised by landlords considering a commitment to Housing First:

## Housing management

Housing First teams typically undertake many elements of housing management, as they provide intensive support to each individual with a focus on tenancy sustainment. The Housing First teams have conversations with the individual to help them understand their responsibilities and rights as a tenant, both before and after they are housed. Homeless Link has produced 'A Guide for People who are offered Housing First' to support these conversations.<sup>8</sup>

Support workers visit the tenant in their home on a regular basis (this might even be daily, especially at the start of a tenancy). This means that any structural or maintenance issues within the property are identified and the tenant is supported to notify the landlord. Regularly attending the property also enables the team to quickly address any problems of anti-social behaviour both towards, and from, the tenant. They also discuss 'door management', ensuring that any problematic visitors are kept to a minimum.

The Housing First worker often acts as a point of contact between the resident, their neighbours and the housing provider, to help alleviate any concerns or issues as soon as they arise. In some services, there are weekly check-ins between Housing First and the Housing Officer so that any issues are addressed quickly and in partnership. This reduces the likelihood of the landlord incurring unnecessary time or costs on interventions by actively managing potential risks to the tenancy, and helping the individual to understand and meet their responsibilities as a tenant.

## Rent payment support

The intensive support provided through Housing First ensures that rent arrears are a rare occurrence. Support workers will actively help the individual to set up and maintain the necessary benefit claims and Alternative Payment Arrangements to ensure that rent and other bills are paid. Due to the trusting relationship usually established with the tenant ahead of moving in, the support worker is likely to become aware of any financial issues, and will take steps to address this and liaise with the housing provider, before problems escalate.

Social Landlords often find it helpful to flag on their system which tenants are with the Housing First service and to make adjustments so that automatic letters (e.g. about rent arrears) are not sent directly to the tenant. Instead, the Housing Officer will go via the Housing First worker and agree a joint plan of action. This avoids letters being left unopened, or tenants feeling overwhelmed and worrying about eviction. The Housing First worker can ensure effective steps are taken alongside the tenant without causing undue stress, and this gives people the chance to develop tenancy management skills at their own pace.

In some cases, Housing First services have been designed to include extra security for landlords by the local authority using risk pooling or insurance schemes, although in practice the need for such schemes has been minimal.<sup>9</sup> The combination of the individual committing to take on a tenancy as part of joining the Housing First

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<sup>8</sup> [https://hfe.homeless.org.uk/sites/default/files/attachments/Guide%20for%20people%20offered%20Housing%20First\\_0.pdf](https://hfe.homeless.org.uk/sites/default/files/attachments/Guide%20for%20people%20offered%20Housing%20First_0.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> <https://hfe.homeless.org.uk/sites/default/files/attachments/Social%20landlords%20and%20Housing%20First.pdf>

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service, along with the intensive support, usually proves effective in establishing good habits around rent payments. Feedback from Social Landlords has been that the rate of arrears among Housing First tenants is the same as, or less than, general needs tenants.<sup>10</sup>

## Type of tenancy

Individuals supported by Housing First should receive the same type of tenancy as anyone else accessing your stock, and share the same rights and responsibilities as general needs tenants.<sup>11</sup> For many Social Landlords this means the offer an initial probationary or starter tenancy of 6 or 12 months, followed by a longer-term tenancy agreement. Where Assured Shorthold Tenancies are in use, length of tenure should be as long as possible to increase stability and security. The type of occupancy agreement should not be changed, or additional conditions applied, because someone is a Housing First tenant.

While the individual property used to house a Housing First resident may change at the end of a tenancy, or based on individual circumstances, the offer of a home should be permanent. Residents are expected to meet the conditions of their tenancy agreement. We recommend that landlords, Housing First teams and local authorities (when involved) have clear agreements in place on the action taken should a tenancy be at risk or break down entirely, and that these should align to the [principles of Housing First](#).

## Housing allocations and choice

Housing First properties are dispersed in the community. They are mostly one-beds, often with high demand for ground floor properties to meet health and mobility needs. Couples or friends might choose to live together.

The approach to allocations varies depending on the local context of Housing First. Often there is a different, more flexible approach so that Housing First clients are able to exercise more choice and control (one of the principles of Housing First) and to access housing more quickly. For example, they might be given higher priority for bidding; be allowed to choose specific areas; and have the option to turn down as many properties as they want. Some services have a direct lettings procedure that is separate to the normal bidding system. For example, a Social Landlord will offer all one-bed voids to the Housing First provider in the first instance to see if they match the preferences of Housing First clients. If not, the void is then allocated to wider bidding.

It is important to note that the landlord should not designate specific properties to meet Housing First commitments, as this reduces fidelity to the principle of choice and control. The client needs to have options, which sometimes means a slower process and waiting for the right void. This is good for landlords who do not need to incur additional void costs by holding on to properties - if no Housing First tenant takes up the offer, the property is immediately available to other prospective tenants. The time it takes people to choose areas, view properties and sign up is valuable in building a trusting relationship with their support worker. Having choice increases the likelihood of finding an area and property that truly meets their needs, improving the potential for tenancy sustainment and positive outcomes for both individual and landlord.

Note that Housing First services have reported problems where Social Landlords offer their hard-to-let voids to meet allocation commitments. Hard-to-let properties are often associated with anti-social behaviour (ASB) or other issues in the neighbourhood, increasing risks and disadvantages for people who have often struggled to

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<sup>10</sup> For example, in this webinar discussion: [www.housing.org.uk/resources/providing-housing-first-as-a-social-landlord](http://www.housing.org.uk/resources/providing-housing-first-as-a-social-landlord)

<sup>11</sup> Picture of Housing First (2020): 59% tenants on AST/fixed term, 33% on assured/secure tenancies

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maintain a tenancy in the past due to these same issues. Social Landlords can alert Housing First teams to intelligence about existing ASB issues with a particular block or location, which could make it a less suitable offer for Housing First tenants. The team can then discuss these risks with the person looking for a home.

## Reducing evictions

Evictions and voids are costly in terms of money and time. Housing First can reduce the risk of eviction. The intensive support that tenants receive decreases the likelihood of abandonment, and can help to minimise the impact of activities or problems that might otherwise lead a landlord to seek possession.

This is not to say that Housing First tenants never move - services will work with landlords to facilitate transfers or other planned moves where an issue in one property cannot be resolved (e.g. exploitation or 'cuckooing' by visitors). The open-ended nature of support, and separation of housing and support, enables Housing First to manage this type of transition in partnership with the landlord.

Research shows that Housing First is a cost effective option for the local community and the public purse.<sup>12,13</sup> By reducing evictions and repeat homelessness, it aligns with the organisational objectives of Social Landlords, and this has been a driver for increasing the number of Social Landlords joining the movement.<sup>14</sup>

## Universal Credit

The issues with welfare benefits that affect Housing First tenants are the same as those affecting general needs tenants. The two most commonly reported issues are with Universal Credit (UC) claims. The first is delays to the claim itself and to the Alternative Payment Arrangement (APA) for rent direct to the landlords. The second is when a new claim for UC triggers automatic deductions for repayment of historical debts. As a result, tenants are at risk of falling into arrears (and of not having enough money for basic needs), especially during the first weeks of their tenancy.

Housing First support teams will be addressing these issues from the start, and helping the tenant to cope. In some cases they may be able to claim discretionary housing payments (DHPs) from the local authority, or to secure charitable grant funding to bridge this gap. There is usually also a personal budget from the support provider to help people in emergencies, and they will be supported to access food banks and other local charities. This intensive support, as with rent payments as discussed above, reduces the risks around benefit claims in comparison to tenants without this level of 1-1 support.

## Social purpose

Housing First aligns with the social purpose of most social housing providers and this has already made it an attractive option for many Social Landlords.<sup>15</sup> It is an approach that can help some of society's most vulnerable and excluded people who experience the most extreme poverty. Individuals supported by Housing First have low incomes and are unable to access good quality homes in other ways. Housing First aims to integrate isolated people into their community, to develop their social networks and to help rebuild their lives.

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<sup>12</sup> <https://hfe.homeless.org.uk/service-evaluations>

<sup>13</sup> [https://hfe.homeless.org.uk/sites/default/files/attachments/The%20cost%20effectiveness%20of%20Housing%20First%20in%20England\\_Mar19.pdf](https://hfe.homeless.org.uk/sites/default/files/attachments/The%20cost%20effectiveness%20of%20Housing%20First%20in%20England_Mar19.pdf)

<sup>14</sup> [www.housing.org.uk/resources/research-report-on-how-housing-associations-use-the-housing-first-model-and-recommendations-for-delivery/](http://www.housing.org.uk/resources/research-report-on-how-housing-associations-use-the-housing-first-model-and-recommendations-for-delivery/)

<sup>15</sup> [www.housing.org.uk/resources/research-report-on-how-housing-associations-use-the-housing-first-model-and-recommendations-for-delivery/](http://www.housing.org.uk/resources/research-report-on-how-housing-associations-use-the-housing-first-model-and-recommendations-for-delivery/)

## Role of Social Landlords in Housing First

The model of Housing First is, at top level, fairly simple. There are two main elements: stable, good quality housing and stable, good quality support. There are two ways in which Social Landlords can join the movement to provide Housing First in England:

1. **You are a general needs housing provider without any support provision:** partner with a voluntary sector organisation that is delivering, or planning to deliver, Housing First support and needs access to social housing tenancies.
2. **You are a general needs housing AND support provider:** develop your own Housing First service to meet the needs of an identified cohort of people experiencing multiple disadvantage in your area.

Social housing is more beneficial than PRS housing in the context of Housing First for several reasons - see Appendix 1 for further details.

Housing providers must be committed to the different, more flexible way of working required by Housing First in order to support individuals successfully and to experience the advantages of the model described above. Experience from existing Housing First projects shows that key ingredients of Housing First for landlords include:

1. Regular communication between Housing Officers/Neighbourhood Teams and Housing First teams
2. Assigning someone as a single point of contact so the Housing First team can escalate urgent issues
3. Being an active partner e.g. attending multi-agency case conferences to solve problems
4. Adapting procedures e.g. not sending automatic letters to Housing First tenants, and talking to the support worker before sending Maintenance/Repairs teams to a Housing First property

Some Social Landlords have gone the extra mile with their good practice, providing an enhanced void offer e.g. decoration and basic furnishing so that the transition into a tenancy (often a high risk period) is as smooth as possible. This is seen as a worthwhile investment in tenancy sustainment as people feel that they have, not just an empty property, but a home. See the National Housing Federation [webinar](#) for this discussion and more.

The following section gives further information for each approach. There are detailed reports and case studies available from Homeless Link, National Housing Federation and others about Housing First in practice. See the Further Information section for links.

### Social Housing for Housing First – Model 1: support through partnership

If you are a Social Landlord providing general needs housing and with no, or limited, experience of delivering supported housing (especially to people experiencing multiple disadvantage), you can still offer homes to people supported by Housing First services by forming partnerships with service providers.

You may want to consider getting involved with a service that is already up and running, or helping to establish a new service. In addition, think about whether you would prefer to be the main housing provider for a specific Housing First service or to offer a handful of allocations to one or more projects – either way, the number of units will be relatively small.

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Where social housing is used in Housing First services, allocations are either made via the local authority (subject to allocations policies or local agreements around use of allocations for Housing First), or directly between the support provider and Social Landlord. There is currently no official mechanism that matches Housing First services or residents to social housing providers, but the recommendations below advise how you can identify contacts.

As social housing is often preferable for Housing First projects, existing services are likely to welcome the offer of a partnership, even if they are currently using PRS housing.

Most Housing First support providers are well established organisations that will have been rigorously assessed for financial viability and other risks in order to receive statutory or charitable funding.

### Recommendations for implementing this model:

- Build partnerships with local authorities and service providers to establish whether a Housing First project is being planned, or is needed, in the areas where you have stock. If you need assistance in finding contacts, email [alex.smith@homelesslink.org.uk](mailto:alex.smith@homelesslink.org.uk).
- Find information about existing services, and the accommodation they are using, on the [Housing First England website](#) and get in touch with them directly. Services that are currently using the PRS may welcome the offer of social housing options.

### Service level agreements

Feedback from current housing and support providers suggests that strong partnerships and collaborative working are necessary to improve service provision, and mitigate risks. Housing and support providers will benefit from having service level agreements, or other protocols, clearly detailing how both agencies will work together. Good communication between Housing First workers and housing officers will improve the way in which a tenant is engaged and supported to maintain their tenancy. See the [Housing First England website](#) for examples of SLAs.

### The value of fidelity to landlords

Fidelity to the principles of Housing First is an important tool for landlords who are considering going into partnership with support providers. Checking the provider's model for support against the principles will give an indication of whether the service will achieve high fidelity, which is associated with higher rates of tenancy sustainment and positive outcomes for individuals. It also means that your teams will have the reassurance of a well-designed, intensive Housing First service and this should give them the confidence to be flexible in their approach.

Landlords can use Homeless Link's guidance on [Housing First Fidelity](#) and on the [Non-Negotiables of Housing First](#) to check key practice, for example:

- Caseload sizes of no more than 7 people
- Open-ended support - no time limit or automatic tapering
- Support workers who will visit properties as frequently as needed
- Flexible working hours (including some evenings and weekends) and out of hours provision
- Multi-agency partnerships e.g. with police, probation, treatment services, health and mental health
- Ethos and language that focuses on people's strengths, goals and aspirations - not only what might go wrong

### Social Housing for Housing First – Model 2: support in-house

If you are a Social Landlord that also provides supported housing services, you may like to develop your own Housing First service to meet the needs of individuals in your areas of operation. This will involve:

- Sourcing funding for the Housing First support team either from local authority commissioning, trusts and foundations, or internal funding resources. Ensure that the support team design and delivery aligns with the [Housing First principles](#) and [guidance for providers](#).
- Making arrangements within your organisation (between general needs housing and supported housing departments) for access to a number of units and increased flexibility in policies and procedures relating to this service.

Use the [Housing First England website](#) for additional background research on the approach and to contact existing services and housing providers to learn about how they have implemented the model, including example Service Level Agreements. If you need help finding contacts, email [alex.smith@homelesslink.org.uk](mailto:alex.smith@homelesslink.org.uk).

### Using Housing First with existing tenants

The Housing First model is primarily used to end long-term or repeat homelessness. However, the approach also has the potential to be offered to those experiencing multiple disadvantage who are already living in social housing and at risk of becoming homeless. Where residents with multiple support needs are having difficulties with tenancy management, putting their tenancy at risk, intensive support that aligns to the principles of could be used to help an individual to overcome these issues. Social Landlords could factor this in when considering either of the above models and may wish to direct additional funding towards Housing First teams as part of a preventative measure to help people to sustain their tenancies and to avoid potentially high-cost evictions or abandonments.

## The challenges of providing Housing First

Delivering Housing First in line with the model's [principles](#) does pose some challenges to housing and support providers, both around the needs of the individuals being supported and due to some systemic issues. However, Housing First outcomes remain successful, with creativity and flexibility overcoming any barriers or issues.

Reports of rent arrears and anti-social behaviour are surprisingly low, with many landlords reporting levels comparable to general needs tenants. The wrap-around support provided goes a long way to ensuring a tenant can maintain their benefit claims and adhere to their tenancy agreement, as well as helping tenants to reduce the likelihood of receiving unwanted visitors. Tenants are reminded that the only condition placed on them is that they must want to sustain a tenancy, and the intensive support and collaborative, flexible working of service providers and landlords generally helps them achieve this.

There may be occasions when an individual needs to move from the property they have been housed in. This could be because they are being targeted by neighbours or previous associates, or their behaviour is causing complaints. However, Housing First is about giving people a permanent offer of housing, so while they may make mistakes, the system needs to be flexible enough to offer them another property if needed. The use of multi-agency case conferences has provided an effective way to manage these situations, either by resolving the problem or arranging an appropriate transfer. On rare occasions, Housing First tenancies have ended without an alternative accommodation in place, but the Housing First team will continue to support that person until housing can be found again. There is some discussion of why tenancies end in this really informative National Housing Federation [webinar](#) featuring four Social Landlords from around the country.

A final challenge to consider is the length of funding contracts for support. The Housing First principles determine that support should be open-ended and available to someone for as long as they need it. However, in the Picture of Housing First (2020) research only 5% of services had indefinite funding. 40% had confirmed funding for only one year and 43% for only 2-3 years.<sup>16</sup> At the same time, 45% of services had been in operation for more than 2 years, suggesting that short term funding cycles can be used to sustain long term services, albeit without the confidence that stable funding brings. When applying for funding or working alongside a service provider, therefore, it is necessary to discuss exit strategies and find out what plans there are to provide the person with alternative support should funding for the Housing First service come to an end. This is also the case for services described as pilots.

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<sup>16</sup> <https://homeless.org.uk/connect/blogs/2020/dec/03/new-research-reveals-scale-of-expansion-of-housing-first>

## Further Information

More information about Housing First can be found on the Housing First England website:

<https://hfe.homeless.org.uk/>

We encourage anyone interested in the approach to join the movement by [signing up for our newsletter](#). You'll be first to hear about opportunities to meet other members of the network, regional and national events and the publication of new resources. Follow us on Twitter @HF\_England for the latest updates.

To be put in contact with other members of the movement, or with any other queries, email:

[alex.smith@homelesslink.org.uk](mailto:alex.smith@homelesslink.org.uk)

### **Housing First England - Picture of Housing First (2020)**

<https://hfe.homeless.org.uk/our-research>

### **Housing First England resources for housing providers**

<https://hfe.homeless.org.uk/housing-providers>

### **Crisis**

Webinar explaining Housing Led, Housing First and Rapid Re-housing:

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=gqpXevFSCk0&feature=youtu.be](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gqpXevFSCk0&feature=youtu.be)

### **Housing First Europe**

<https://housingfirsteurope.eu/>

### **Housing First Scotland**

<https://homelessnetwork.scot/housing-first/>

### **National Federation of ALMOs**

'Can social housing rebalance the homeless equation?':

<https://thinkhouse.org.uk/site/assets/files/2230/almo0920.pdf>

### **National Housing Federation**

Webinar discussion with four social landlords:

[www.housing.org.uk/resources/providing-housing-first-as-a-social-landlord/](http://www.housing.org.uk/resources/providing-housing-first-as-a-social-landlord/)

Research report on how housing associations use the Housing First model and recommendations for delivery:

[www.housing.org.uk/resources/research-report-on-how-housing-associations-use-the-housing-first-model-and-recommendations-for-delivery/](http://www.housing.org.uk/resources/research-report-on-how-housing-associations-use-the-housing-first-model-and-recommendations-for-delivery/)

## Appendix 1: Why social housing works for Housing First

There are four main reasons why social housing is, in many cases, more beneficial than Private Rented Sector (PRS) housing in the context of Housing First:

### **Cost**

There are numerous challenges to sourcing housing from the PRS, particularly in areas of the country where the market rental cost and Local Housing Allowance (LHA) are different. The PRS also requires an individual to provide a deposit and rent in advance, in addition to any fees charged by the agency or landlord; an individual on benefits does not usually have access to this money. For these reasons, other tenants competing for the property may be more desirable. Social housing is affordable, and generally requires less money to be paid in advance, even though more Housing Associations are moving towards a rent in advance model in preparation for Universal credit.

### **Stability**

The PRS does not offer a great deal of stability to tenants – particularly those with a low income. Rising rents mean that those claiming welfare benefits may be ‘priced out’ of their home once their assured shorthold tenancy expires, and will need to find other accommodation. Although instances of anti-social behaviour and rent arrears are reportedly low in Housing First, if an issue does arise, a private landlord may be less tolerant or flexible than a social housing provider. And in areas where the LHA rate does not meet the market rent, Housing First tenants are forced to move away from their support networks to find suitable accommodation. Social housing offers more stability in tenancy length and location, and more tolerance should problems arise.

### **Quality**

In some areas of the country, accommodation in the PRS that falls within the LHA rate can be poor quality. Due to the lack of regulatory standards, properties can be extremely small and in dire condition, with maintenance issues going unrepaired for months. Social housing is regulated and usually of a better quality.

### **Flexibility**

Occasionally, a situation may arise in which a Housing First tenant needs to move from their current home to a new one. This may be due to problems occurring in the area they are living or with neighbours, or where risks mean they need to move to a different location for safeguarding purposes. The volume of properties in a social housing provider’s portfolio can enable these transitions to take place more smoothly, reducing the negative impact on the landlord and the tenant.



## 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.

# Let's end homelessness together

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