



**Housing
First
England**

Guidance for
**housing management
teams**

Housing First

Guidance for housing management teams

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Introduction

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, and over the last decade has grown in popularity across Canada and Europe. International evidence indicates that 70-90% of Housing First residents maintain their accommodation and make progress in other areas of their lives.

The Scottish Government has embedded Housing First in its Rapid Rehousing Transition Plans,¹ 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.² Research by Homeless Link shows that at least 87 Housing First projects are being delivered across England.³

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 differs from other floating and tenancy support approaches due to caseload size, with workers supporting no more than seven people. 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.

About this guidance

Social landlords play a key role in the delivery of Housing First. This guidance is written for housing teams involved in the operational delivery of Housing First. Information is drawn from conversations and good practice shared by 17 Housing Associations and ALMOs, as well as research and guidance from National Housing Federation and the National Federation of ALMOs, and the work of Housing First England.

Housing providers can also refer to Homeless Link's [Introduction for Social Landlords](#), which looks at the approach and the role of landlords from a more strategic perspective.

For simplicity, we have used Housing Officer as a generic term to cover the different housing roles across allocation and lettings, neighbourhood, tenancy and income teams etc. Support Worker is used as the equivalent generic term for Housing First project/support workers, navigators, team leaders etc.

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

² <https://homeless.org.uk/connect/blogs/2020/dec/22/housing-first-pilots-interim-evaluation-report-published>

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

Understanding the Housing First principles

For a project to be Housing First and achieve high fidelity to the model, it has to follow the seven principles:

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

For more detail about what these mean in practice, see Homeless Link's [fidelity guidance](#). From a housing perspective, Housing First require adaptations to most landlords' standard working practices, and Principles 3 and 4 in particular need explanation. Also see the [guidance on Housing First non-negotiables](#).

Housing and support are separated

This means that a person's housing does not depend on them engaging with support – they can choose not to attend appointments or not to follow a support plan, and this won't affect their tenancy. It also means that their support will continue, even if a tenancy breaks down or if they choose to move to a different property.

While a lot of Housing First projects have separate support and housing providers, this is not a requirement. There are projects where the landlord is also the support provider e.g. South Yorkshire Housing Association, Wolverhampton Homes and Cornwall Housing. Where one provider covers both elements, this principle still applies and the support team must be committed to continuing to work with someone on their caseload, even if they were subsequently housed by another landlord. And, as a landlord, they cannot take action against a tenant because they stop engaging with support.

There are some advantages reported with in-house delivery: communication is streamlined and there is a shared understanding of processes, which means issues are quickly identified and addressed. The downside can be an expectation from colleagues that the support team will prioritise housing issues, which can create conflict with principle 4 – the individual having choice and control over how and when they engage.

The separation of housing and support relates to the tenant. In terms of the organisations, the delivery of housing and support should be a [partnership](#) with strong lines of communication and a shared commitment to people keeping their homes for the long term. Ideally, landlord and support provider will be working together from the point of referral in order to achieve the best outcomes for an individual.

Choice and control

When people are accepted on to a Housing First scheme, their Support Worker will discuss with them where they want to live. Often, they will be housed in temporary accommodation or a hostel while making decision and looking for a property. However, in some cases this won't be possible and people will be looking for a home while sleeping on the streets.

Prospective Housing First tenants are offered far greater choice than in general needs. They are given the chance to view and refuse multiple properties, or to change their minds about which area or property type they want. There is also choice over furnishings and decoration – some Housing First landlords offer an enhanced

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void package so that people aren't moving into bare properties, while elsewhere it is the support provider who arranges a starter pack and personalised budget. See Housing First England's '[Personal Budget's briefing](#).'

Tenants have choice and control over how and when they see their Support Worker, however the worker will be persistent and proactive in offering support if the tenant isn't engaging e.g. visiting the property, calling or texting, or going out to find them out on the streets or via other agencies.

The Support Worker and Housing Officer will come to an agreement about how best to manage contact with each other and also with the tenant. In some cases, the tenant will prefer their Support Worker to be the single point of contact. In this case, any calls or letters go to the Support Worker, who will also arrange to be at the property for any housing management visits. In other cases, the tenant might choose to engage with the Housing Officer as well. This may change over time – the key thing is that the tenant decides, and the partners flex their approach to facilitate this choice.

Needs and responsibilities

What about the tenant's obligations?

To be accepted on to Housing First, a person must first agree to take on the responsibility of holding a tenancy. Willingness to hold a tenancy is the only condition that exists in Housing First – see the '[Guide for people offered Housing First](#)'.

People are given the same type of tenancy as anyone else, which means they must be prepared to pay rent and bills, and to meet the conditions of their tenancy. The availability of intensive support will help them to do this. There is no requirement that they demonstrate a 'good' housing history or meet any 'tenancy ready' requirements, as long as they are willing to try.

In some cases, people will agree to join Housing First but later find that it isn't right for them – perhaps the responsibilities of a tenancy are overwhelming or living independently feels isolating. In these cases, the support team will help the tenant to identify their next move and arrange for them to relinquish their tenancy. There is always the option for that person to try again in future.

It's common for Housing First tenants to move between properties, as they adjust to having a settled home. For example, someone might choose an area close to social networks but then find those networks are an obstacle to their recovery. Issues such as cuckooing might lead to a transfer for safety. The Housing Officer, along with Lettings and Allocations teams, [working jointly](#) with the support provider, play a vital role in avoiding repeat homelessness with a smooth transition.

Traditional housing models are often based on reward and punishment i.e. you have to earn the right to be housed and can be punished by losing this right. Housing First takes the opposite approach – housing is a fundamental right and a person's access to housing cannot be used to reward or punish. Housing Officers may find this a challenge to their normal working culture. At the same time, Housing First isn't about avoiding an eviction at all costs. Sometimes a tenancy breaks down, and there's learning about what went wrong and how to avoid those problems recurring. Because the support continues and is informed by learning, there is a higher likelihood of sustainment in the next tenancy. This is in contrast to the reward/punishment approach, where the end of a tenancy typically means someone starts from scratch on the streets.

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The term 'elastic tolerance' is used to describe the way that Housing First providers respond to tenants' needs. For example, someone might need time to adjust to living indoors after years on the streets, using alternating periods of sleeping rough and periods in their property, and the landlord will be tolerant of this pattern, seeing it as a necessary part of that tenant's move away from homelessness.

In Housing teams using a reward and punishment approach, a person with a history of tenancy problems is often treated with less tolerance than other tenants. This can mean that people whose needs are more complex are expected to demonstrate 'model' behaviour and, if they fail, action is taken a lot more quickly. In contrast, the elastic tolerance of Housing First allows for the fact that people are likely to make mistakes or have problems, and instead seeks to prevent or resolve these issues through collaboration and support, rather than moving quickly to punish.

What kind of support needs do Housing First tenants have, and how are they met?

Housing First is designed to support people who will benefit from an intensive level of support in order to live independently. Many Housing First projects use referral criteria based on the [NDT Assessment](#) (also known as the Chaos Index). Typically, people will have a complex combination of needs around physical and mental health, homelessness, substance use, involvement with the criminal justice system, and surviving domestic abuse. Often, they will have been in a series of housing situations without ever reaching stability or positive move-on.

Housing First tenants are typically refused by other housing and homelessness services on the grounds of complexity, chaos or risk. Housing First is the best chance they have to leave homelessness for good.

Housing Associations are often already housing people with complex needs among their general needs housing population, so the issues will be familiar. The key differences to bear in mind with Housing First, compared to other forms of tenancy support, are that:

- Housing First Support Workers have a maximum caseload of 7 people.
- Support Workers usually know people before they move in – a trusting relationship has been developed during the referral phase and property search process.
- Support is intensive, responsive and flexible – perhaps meeting every day when someone is in crisis, offering evening and weekend contact, and typically responding in a matter of hours.
- Support Workers will also engage other agencies, such as mental health teams or treatment services, to coordinate multi-agency support around the tenant (sometimes called 'wrap-around support')
- There will be regular communication and close joint working between housing support and housing to achieve a shared commitment of tenancy sustainment.

It is these differences that have given housing providers the confidence to join the Housing First movement.

How is the relationship between Support Workers and Housing Officers organised?

Housing Officers will often find that Housing First Support Workers are covering elements of housing that would usually fall to them, because they are committed to helping sustain a tenancy. This can be a real advantage of having a Housing First tenant on your patch. Discuss your roles at the outset to ensure there is a shared understanding of who will do what. See the ['Housing & support responsibilities checklist'](#) (in the resources downloads section) that sets out who will lead on which action – create your own local version to ensure that nothing is missed, especially during the critical move-in period.

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Support Workers will provide a high level of contact to the tenant – when someone first moves in or is going through a crisis, there might be daily contact.

The exact nature of the relationship between Housing Officer and tenant will vary. Communication may be primarily through the Support Worker, where the tenant doesn't feel able to manage multiple relationships around their tenancy. In other cases, the tenant has a direct relationship with both the Support Worker and the Housing Officer. However this works, the two staff members need to communicate consistently.

Clear divisions of responsibility can be helpful to preserve the separation of housing and support. For example, if a more formal conversation is required around rent arrears or ASB, the Support Worker won't usually be the right person to take that role and the Housing/Income Officer steps in to do this. For some individuals, managing their tenancy directly with their landlord's representative is part of becoming settled and more independent. The choice and control principle of Housing First also applies in how the tenant engages with housing and this can change over time. Some tenants will, eventually, choose not to have Housing First support and will become the same as any other general needs tenant (albeit with the option of returning to Housing First should their situation change).

Also see the [quick guide on joint working](#) between Housing First support and housing teams.

Housing management in Housing First

There is no single model of Housing First and each project will use a different combination of delivery methods. In this section, we outline some of the common ways of working described by Housing teams already delivering Housing First.

Referrals

Most Housing First schemes use a panel of key agencies (including the local authority, housing provider and support provider) who assess referrals against eligibility criteria, for example based on the NDT Assessment (also known as the Chaos Index). See Housing First England's '[Eligibility and Referrals Briefing](#)'.

Housing First is designed for people who have not thrived with other housing and support offers. People are likely to have complex histories that may include rent arrears, unsuccessful tenancies, substance misuse, time spent in institutions like hospital or prison, and periods of sleeping rough. Referrals include information that could mean a person would not be offered a general needs tenancy, but the intensive Housing First support offer enables landlords to allocate this type of tenancy.

Each referral should be taken on a case-by-case basis, with no blanket exclusions. Housing First offers intensive support (ideally with multi-agency involvement) and a plan can be agreed to manage risks and give a person the best chance of succeeding in their tenancy this time.

People being referred into Housing First must have the chance to discuss the project, and especially the responsibilities that come with a tenancy. Some people don't want Housing First even if they meet the referral criteria. Referral processes should include time for the person and the Support Worker to have an informed conversation. This can be a challenge if someone has a chaotic life and is living on the streets, so there may be a delay between the referral panel accepting someone into Housing First and the Support Worker confirming that the person agrees to join the scheme.

Housing providers should keep in touch with support providers to check progress. The allocations process shouldn't begin until the prospective tenant is engaging with their Support Worker and ready to make choices about where to live.

Allocations

Allocations are typically either via direct lets where the landlord has nomination rights, or by giving Housing First clients a higher banding in order to get first choice of appropriate properties. Depending on the local structure of housing provision and commissioning of Housing First, allocations may be via the local authority system (e.g. choice based lettings) or directly from the Housing Association or ALMO (e.g. voids are offered to Housing First on a case-by-case basis). The allocations process should be part of the local Housing First Service Level Agreement so that each organisation's role is clearly set out – landlord, support provider and local authority.⁴ The number of units allocated to Housing First is usually fixed, sometimes with quotas agreed by each housing provider if multiple social landlords are involved. Allocations are made in real time once people are ready to look for a property – units are not set aside in advance, because this limits choice.

⁴ See template SLAs: <https://hfe.homeless.org.uk/housing-providers>

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Housing allocations teams and the Housing First support team will work closely together to identify voids that might be suitable. The support team shares information about which areas and types of property are currently needed, helping to ensure that voids aren't delayed by being offered to Housing First when that property isn't right for the people looking at that time. The allocations team shares information about stock location, type and turnover that will help people to make choices.

The local knowledge of allocations and neighbourhood teams is vital here. Ideally, check for any issues with voids e.g. previous ASB at that property, or a neighbour making persistent or vexatious complaints, and explain to the support team why these voids might be unsuitable. Regular, open communication with the support team is important so that they can keep the prospective tenant engaged and informed e.g. about timescales, especially where stock is low.

Choice of property plays a big role in engaging people with Housing First. The relationship between individual and Support Worker typically develops during this period. This is not about unrealistic choices – the role of the Support Worker is to help the prospective tenant understand what is available in their area(s) and budget, and to understand the factors affecting their choice. For example, they might have the option of choosing a less favoured location in order to get a property more quickly, and the worker will help them consider pros and cons of each choice.

There is usually high demand for one beds and ground floor flats/bungalows due to health and mobility needs. Adaptations may be required. The allocations/lettings and support teams discuss these issues and aim to streamline processes, e.g. repairs and adaptations, to minimise delays in getting people into suitable housing.

Landlords have found that telling people about voids too early can cause problems, if there is then a long delay e.g. maintenance. Some housing providers will identify a potential void for Housing First, but wait until there has been a void report so that the Support Worker and prospective tenant know how long they have to wait. Delays can have a huge impact, especially when someone is still living on the streets or in other risky situations. If the void turnaround takes too long, the person may lose faith in the process and disengage completely. So it's important that the allocations team keeps talking to the Support Worker, and avoids raising unrealistic expectations about when a property will be ready. The prospective tenant may choose to look at other properties rather than feel left in limbo.

Some Housing Associations have tried to allocate hard-to-let properties to meet Housing First commitments, but this tends to be counter-productive. The reasons a property is hard to let often mean that a Housing First tenant will struggle to succeed e.g. existing anti-social behaviour or risk of exploitation. Bear in mind that Housing First tenants may be vulnerable e.g. to cuckooing, and this may affect choice of location.

Look out for colleagues who are reluctant to accept a Housing First tenant on their patch. They might be making risk arguments focused on the prospective tenant, rather than their local knowledge. Landlords have found that some staff commit to Housing First in theory, but are unwilling to house someone on their own patch in practice. Managers need to be alert to this, offering support and reminders about the intensive support the tenant will bring with them. Many Housing First tenants live quietly and require no additional Housing input, but this is often forgotten when the scheme is new and people are anxious about the impact of taking a different approach.

Landlords recommend not placing Housing First tenants in nearby properties, as shared social networks and/or vulnerabilities may lead to both tenants experiencing shared problems with visitor management.

Lettings

Tenant choice

Timing is a critical issue for Housing First lettings – taking on a tenancy is a big decision and people need to feel in control of their choice.

- Where possible, give people the option of sleeping on it and making a decision the day after a viewing.
- Avoid pressuring people to accept a property on the spot.

As discussed above, any delays between viewing and sign-up need to be explained and regular updates given to the Support Worker. Bear in mind that the prospective tenant may not have anywhere to live while they wait.

Type of tenancy

Housing First tenancies are the same as any general needs tenancy. No extra conditions or charges are applied. While some landlords move responsibility for the management of Housing First properties into their supported housing team (to make best use of this in-house expertise), the tenancy and rent are unchanged.

Furnishing the property

Speak to the Support Worker about what condition the property will be in when the tenancy is signed – don't assume that they know what to expect.

- Some Housing First landlords provide enhanced void packages e.g. white goods and flooring, or choice of paint colours.
- Elsewhere, the support provider leads on furnishing through personalised budgets and/or applying for charity grants.

Moving into an empty flat and having to organise flooring, curtains, white goods, furniture etc is a significant challenge for many people, not to mention very expensive, and this challenge is far greater for someone moving from the streets.

Person-centred sign-up

Review your sign-up process: think about how long it takes and what you expect from the tenants e.g. reading and absorbing information.

- Extend the sign-up over two or three meetings rather than trying to get everything done at once, which might be tough for the tenant to sit through.
- Shorter meetings ensure there is time to talk things through and that the tenant is more engaged with the process.
- Give paperwork to the Support Worker to review with the tenant in advance.

Breaking down the process and making it less formal can help to build your relationship – a few tea/smoke breaks might be appreciated. A more relaxed introduction also makes it easier if you need to talk about any tenancy issues later on.

Joint working

Tenants may feel overwhelmed when they move in, and this period is high risk for abandonment, disengagement and issues with the tenancy. The Support Worker will be working hard to help the tenant get settled, and there should be frequent communication with the Housing Officer while getting things set up.

- Agree in advance who is responsible for which elements of the sign-up in this period e.g. benefit claims, utilities and Alternative Payment Arrangements (APAs).

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- Create a local checklist with clearly assigned responsibilities so that nothing is missed – see the example that accompanies this guidance.

Income

Housing First tenants accept the responsibility of holding a tenancy, and this includes rent liabilities, the same as any other tenant. While the underlying rent policies remain the same, landlords make adjustments to support tenants around rent. These include:

- Flagging Housing First tenancies on the system so the rent team know to take a different approach.
- Not sending automatic letters or statements – channelling communication via a specific Support Worker or Housing Officer.
- Setting up Alternative Payment Arrangements from the outset.

Systemic issues with Universal Credit, primarily delays to the first payment and APAs missing the first one or two rent periods, can create pressure on Housing First tenants. Examples of mitigations include:

- The council putting a month's rent into tenant accounts to cover any early UC delays and avoid their statement showing arrears (which could be a trigger for abandonment).
- Support Worker setting the expectation that the tenant will need to pay the first month's rent directly before the APA kicks in, to avoid this coming as a shock and to make practical arrangements on payday.

Repairs and maintenance

As with rents, putting a flag on the system for Housing First tenancies ensures that there's some extra consideration. Communication about repairs and maintenance might be channelled via the Support Worker who can help set up appointments and give tenants reminders. Where a tenant's life is still chaotic, appointments might still be missed, so flexibility is valuable.

Explain any regular maintenance/health and safety checks at sign-up so the tenant knows what to expect.

The time it takes to complete repairs can create problems, with the risk that tenants becoming frustrated and disengaging if responses are slow. Explain to the tenant and/or Support Worker how your repairs process works, so that everyone has realistic expectations of the process.

Proactive risk management

Housing Officers and Support Workers can work together to find ways to prevent past issues recurring in someone's new tenancy. Examples include:

- Using a keybox or keypad for someone likely to forget their key and kick the door down; or to prevent unwanted visitors from gaining control of the front door.
- Explaining how the tenant can divert their communal door entry system to the call centre where there is a risk of cuckooing and they need help to turn away unwanted visitors.
- Asking the Fire Service to fit additional sprinklers/alarms or safety shut-off mechanisms on appliance for someone with a history or risk of fires at home.
- Supporting tenants to engage with the landlord's community services, e.g. employment workshops, gardening clubs, residents' associations etc, to build new social networks and reduce isolation.
- Helping the tenant with complaints and mediation to address neighbour issues before they escalate.
- Fitting a video doorbell to increase the tenant's control over their front door.

Progression in Housing First tenancies

The housing providers we spoke to pointed out that most of their Housing First tenants successfully maintain their tenancy, living quietly and neighbours not knowing that the property is part of a different scheme. Housing First focuses on strengths, goals and aspirations, so it's not unusual for tenants to be attending college, volunteering, finding employment or building their network in the local community. Having a settled home can be transformative, whatever that person's history.

Eventually, some tenants might choose not to receive Housing First support and their case becomes dormant, at which point they will be the same as any other general needs tenant. Others will prefer to stay connected to support in the long term, but often at a far less intensive level as time goes on.

On occasion, a tenant might relinquish in order to return to supported accommodation, enter a long term rehab, or complete a long prison sentence. Housing Officers can help by providing clear information about the process to relinquish and leave the flat – especially if the tenant isn't there to move out in person. The Support Worker will either continue to provide support, or the person's case becomes dormant until they need the scheme again e.g. on release from prison. If the process of relinquishing the tenancy is handled sensitively, this will help to build trust and start the next tenancy on a positive note. It's also important to avoid any build-up of arrears that could be a barrier to future tenancies.

Problems in Housing First tenancies

Where problems do arise, landlords are usually flexible and continue in the spirit of Housing First by working with the tenant and support provider to arrange tenancy transfers rather than moving to evict. Regular, open communication between Housing Officers and Support Workers will ensure that issues are flagged early and that preventative steps are taken.

Practical examples of risk management include:

- Arranging for a hoarding support specialist to speak with a tenant about safety.
- Limiting access by unwanted visitors – from changing the locks/fitting a keypad because someone has taken the keys, through to closure notices in consultation with the tenant and support provider.
- Additional soundproofing or fire safety measures.
- Mediation between tenants where there are neighbour complaints (remember that Housing First tenants aren't always causing the problem!).

The issue most often mentioned in our research is cuckooing (people taking over the tenant's property). This highlights the fact that many people coming into Housing First are vulnerable to exploitation by others. It can also be hard for people to disengage from their previous networks, even if they want to make changes. Housing Officers often become aware of these issues through neighbours raising concerns e.g. about noise, visitors coming and going, and other disruption. They should work jointly with the Support Worker to find out what is happening and apply their respective expertise and resources to resolve the problem.

At times, Housing Officers might become aware of behaviour that indicates someone is experiencing problems with their mental health. For example, extreme alterations, damage or the creation of unsafe conditions in the property could be linked to a deterioration in mental health. Raise concerns with the Support Worker and work together on appropriate responses, as this avoids moving too quickly to an enforcement response when someone may be in crisis and needing support.

Multi-agency meetings

Housing First is at its most effective when the Housing Officer and Support Worker are part of a wider multi-agency response. This might include the council, social services, health, mental health, treatment agencies, street outreach, police, probation, community safety, and the ASB team alongside the housing and support providers.

If problems arise in a tenancy, a multi-agency case conference is held to find solutions. This can mean that one tenancy takes up a disproportionate amount of a Housing Officer's time while these problems are being addressed, but it's really important that the housing provider is represented in these discussions so that action is coordinated and timely. There may be a period of intense activity, but it will be worth it to prevent an eviction and enable the tenant to become more settled in their home.

See Housing First England's guide to [joint working](#) and [briefing on multi-agency working](#).

Case studies – housing teams in Housing First

Almond Housing

Almond Housing developed a Housing First offer in partnership with support provider Rock Trust, having identified a gap in local provision for care leavers. There's a close partnership, with Almond and Rock Trust making joint decisions on referrals.

In order to deliver the scheme with high consistency, Almond allocated all Housing First tenancies to one Housing Officer as part of their wider patch. A lead manager was closely involved in setting up the first five tenancies, meeting the Housing Officer each week and keeping senior managers updated about those five tenancies. This helped to build the visibility of Housing First and demonstrate its progress, overcoming initial scepticism within the organisation. The first tenancies were a steep learning curve, but subsequent lets went ahead with much less management input once the new ways of working were in place.

The team at Almond have modified their housing management approach for Housing First and other vulnerable tenants by adopting an elastic tolerance approach. Responses to problems such as anti-social behaviour, damage or disengagement are flexible and decided on a case-by-case basis. The Housing Officer and Housing First Support Worker meet every week and share information so that support remains joined up. The Housing Officer is trained in Trauma Informed Care and there are plans to train the wider housing teams in this approach, to benefit their work with general needs tenants.

Sovereign Housing

Sovereign is the housing provider for six Housing First schemes, delivered in partnership with a range of support providers across multiple local authority areas. Service Level Agreements set out their role as an active partner working closely with the support provider. Their Housing First commitment looks beyond providing a property and to the long-term relationship with the tenant, and the success of the tenancy is understood as a shared goal of both housing and support partners.

Their Housing First housing management is delivered by the Supported Housing Team, even though the properties are from general needs stock. This reflects the particular skills and experience that this team bring to working with people with complex needs. The teams are trained in Trauma Informed Care and Psychologically Informed Environments, which has helped them to think creatively and adapt their offer. Standard procedures don't apply, for example there are no automatic arrears letters. Instead, the Housing Officer works closely with the Support Worker and they communicate with the tenant jointly.

Managers help to raise awareness about Housing First with other teams. There is widespread commitment to the approach, but Housing Officers often need extra support and space for discussion when a Housing First property is allocated on their patch. They worry that Housing First tenants will be disruptive, so the team has secured permission to share some of their success stories internally, and this is helping to change colleagues' perceptions of people housed by the scheme.

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South Yorkshire Housing Association

SYHA are involved in the delivery of three Housing First schemes. In two locations they deliver both the housing and support, while the third is housing only. The separation of housing and support is maintained, and teams are sensitive to when a conversation needs to be led by a Housing colleague, for example because a more formal response is needed. Housing First support teams have developed close working relationships with Neighbourhood teams to ensure that communication with a tenant about potential tenancy breaches is led by the right person to avoid undermining the support relationship. Having the time to build a strong rapport with customers before their move into a property has also helped the Housing First team to communicate with tenants around their responsibilities and what support will be available from the team to make this a success, making the move a less daunting and more manageable experience.

Where SYHA provides housing management only, with an external support provider, they have adapted processes and introduced increased tolerance and flexibility. The support provider is given a lot of autonomy to provide the service, and SYHA as landlord recognise that a rigid approach could disrupt the model. However, in order to meet their legal obligations as landlord, limits have to be placed on flexibility from time to time e.g. checking that people referred into Housing First are willing to take on the responsibilities of being a tenant.

Wolverhampton Homes

Wolverhampton Homes is an ALMO delivering both the housing and support elements of Housing First, in partnership with a second support provider. At the start of the project, they brought together colleagues from income, tenancies, lettings and ASB functions for a planning day. This was an opportunity to introduce the approach and explain the difference it could make to the lives of people sleeping rough, as well as discussing how it would work in-house. The provision of intensive support via small caseloads was a key factor in reassuring teams about the approach, and there was strong buy-in to the prospect of ending cycles of eviction and abandonment, where people returned from the streets and hostels back into tenancies that would often fail again.

The Wolverhampton Homes model includes a multi-agency panel with clear criteria, and people accepted on to Housing First qualify for emergency banding. They have housed a number of women through Housing First and are working closely with the local specialist agencies to develop more gender-informed support. Having a wider range of agencies around the table has broadened referrals, for example recognising where people are sofa surfing or relying on survival sex instead of sleeping rough but still meet the eligibility criteria.

There is close communication between the housing and support teams, so any issues are flagged up quickly. The tenant's Support Worker is named on their account, so the relevant team knows who to contact if there's an issue, for example the Income team know not to issue standard letters or notices to a Housing First property as this might trigger abandonment. There is also an effective partnership with the DWP, with a single point of contact for the support team so, where consent is in place, any problems with claims can be addressed quickly.

The principle of separating housing and support is upheld - tenants can disengage from support without penalty and support will continue even if a tenancy breaks down.

Training and support for housing teams

Delivering Housing First isn't easy but, when done right, it can deliver great results for tenant and landlord. It requires buy-in from the wider organisation and support for teams to work in a different way, introducing elements of flexibility across all the functions mentioned above. Ongoing support is needed, as some staff will be involved in responding to complex situations.

Housing providers have embedded Housing First in a number of ways:

- Initial workshops to raise awareness of Housing First, covering the principles and evidence base, and including teams such as rents, repairs and maintenance, customer service roles
- Housing First training for relevant teams
- Regular support and supervision from managers
- Name a Housing First champion for your organisation who can share successes and developments
- Time to engage with support teams and attend multi-agency case conferences
- Briefings from/shadowing with local partners e.g. homelessness, mental health, treatment agencies
- Engaging with the [Housing First England network](#) e.g. newsletter, national practice forums
- Reflective practice sessions to discuss individual cases
- Joint local practice forums with support and housing teams
- Training focused on responding to complex needs, such as Trauma Informed Care – see the Housing First England [training offer](#)

Further reading

More information about Housing First can be found on the [Housing First England website](#).

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

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>



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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