



BECAUSE PEOPLE MATTER

HOUSING FIRST

– FIFTEEN YEARS ON





EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

It has been 15 years since Turning Point Scotland (TPS) led on bringing the first Housing First service to the UK. In those years, Housing First has gone from a novel service to a mainstream housing option in Scotland. The entire sector should be proud of the scale and speed of development for Housing First. However, we know that the job is not yet done.

In this paper, we look back on our reflections from five years ago, when we marked 10 years of Housing First, we'll look at what has changed and what still needs to change to not just deliver a good Housing First service but to ensure that the whole system is designed to deliver wrap around support when and where it is needed.

There is a strong international evidence base showing that Housing First is effective at helping people to maintain a stable tenancy. The independent review of Scotland's Housing First Pathfinder (HFP) initiative confirmed that a Housing First approach in Scotland helps people not only to maintain a tenancy, but also to engage with health services, reduce substance use, reduce interactions with the justice system, build stronger relationships with family and connect with their communities¹.

Though TPS believes that Housing First works for most people navigating complex challenges, for a small number of people, Housing First is not appropriate or is not wanted. Alongside Housing First, we see a gap for settled, high quality supported housing with no time limit and coordinated wrap around support as a housing option for this group.

Homelessness is a complex and multi-faceted issue that cannot be solved Housing First services working alone. Nor can Housing First services provide full wrap around support in isolation. At their best, Housing First services work closely with a range of health and social care, justice and other agencies to provide coordinated support. However, in our experience, Housing First is still seen primarily as a housing service and it is often difficult to get full buy in from agencies outside of housing and homelessness. We need to move towards a whole systems approach to see full benefits from Housing First.

We believe that a new oversight group for Housing First, with representatives from Scottish Government, local authorities, health and social care, justice and Housing First providers could provide direction, guidance and pressure to scale up Housing First services to meet demand. A cross sector group would show that there is continued commitment to scaling up Housing First and a recognition from across Government that Homelessness is Everybody's Business.

¹ Johnsen, S, Blenkinsopp, J & Rayment, M 2022, Scotland's Housing First Pathfinder Evaluation: Final Report. Heriot-Watt University, Edinburgh. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.17861/8GJ7-SV28>

INTRODUCTION

In October 2010, Turning Point Scotland (TPS) opened the first Housing First service in the UK. That pilot service was not only the first Housing First project in the UK, it was also one of the first internationally to explicitly target people who were involved in active drug use and also experiencing homelessness². The pilot was funded by TPS, the Big Lottery Fund and Greater Glasgow and Clyde Health Board and the service was delivered by TPS, in partnership with Housing Associations including Glasgow Housing Association (now Wheatley Group) and Queens Cross Housing Association, among others to provide settled Housing First tenancies.

Housing First is an approach that provides people with settled, stable housing with coordinated wrap around support as quickly as possible, without a requirement to be “housing ready.” The approach has shown some incredible results in terms of tenancy sustainment for a group of people with multiple and complex support needs, who had often been failed by the more traditional approaches for years.

TPS is now the largest provider of Housing First in Scotland, having delivered Housing First services in 9 local authorities, with over 550 individuals.

‘I was a shadow of a person when I first met everyone – with help and support and encouragement I have stepped out to do stuff I didn’t think I wanted to or could do.’

Housing First Service User in Perth

That Housing First service in Glasgow welcomed its first service user in October 2010. Most of those original 22 Housing First tenants are still in their tenancies, tenancies that many people believed they could never maintain.

AN EVOLVING LANDSCAPE

A lot has changed in 15 years. What was once a controversial, challenging and challenged approach has become a mainstream housing option for people. Scotland has embraced Housing First on a national and local level; it is embedded in national strategies with support from Scottish Government and Housing First services are also well established in most local authorities. A set of principles, strongly based on those endorsed by FEANTSA³ have been adopted and are promoted in Scotland. Housing First for Scotland⁴ principles work within the policy landscape and have been proven to achieve good outcomes for people and for the public purse. Because of the pace of implementation and the high level of political support at a national and local level, Scotland has been called a ‘pioneer’ in the implementation of Housing First by researchers and commentators across Europe⁵. We all have a lot to be proud of.

² Johnsen, S, Turning Point Scotland’s Housing First Project Evaluation, Heriot Watt University and Turning Point Scotland, 2020 Available from: https://homelesnetwork.scot/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/TPS_Housing_First_Final_Report.pdf

³ Housing First Europe Hub, Housing First Guide video: Core Principle of HF <https://housingfirsteurope.eu/multimedia/housing-first-guide-video-core-principles-of-hf/>

⁴ <https://homelesnetwork.scot/housing-first/know-how/principles/>

⁵ Johnsen, S, Blenkinsopp, J & Rayment, M, Gaining and Preserving Pioneer Status: Key Lessons from the Housing First Pathfinder Programme in Scotland, European Journal of Homelessness _ Volume 17, No. 1 _ 2023

WHAT WE'RE LEARNING

Fifteen years on from introducing Housing First to the UK, we have built a strong evidence base. We not only have international evidence from North America and across Europe, we have evidence that within Scotland's unique legislative and service landscape, Housing First works.

The evaluation of Scotland's Housing First Pathfinder (HFP) initiative confirmed that a Housing First approach helps people to maintain a tenancy, engage with health services, reduce substance use, reduce interactions with the justice system, build stronger relationships with family and connect with their communities⁶.

International evidence also confirms that it is cost effective, providing better value for money than the traditional 'staircase model' of supported accommodation⁷ because it provides people with a safe and secure home, with the support that they need, for as long as is wanted.

We also know from our experience with service users that Housing First makes a significant and positive difference for people; people who have been failed again and again by other services.

However, even with this evidence, some Housing First services are still struggling to demonstrate their value, particularly when progress is not linear or stereotypical.

FIDELITY – WHAT IT MEANS AND WHY IT MATTERS

What started as a small pilot in Glasgow 15 years ago has grown to be delivered nationally by a range of third sector and statutory providers in 27 local authorities across Scotland and in a steadily growing number of local authorities and city regions in England and Wales. Housing First is now part of mainstream service delivery to respond to homelessness in the UK, and indeed, it is an evidence based, and extremely effective model. But, at TPS, we wonder if this mainstreaming and scaling up of provision is starting to water down the meaning of Housing First. We see services being tendered as Housing First with high ratios of worker to service user, with high barriers to entry, inappropriate referrals and without a clear separation between support and accommodation. We now hear discussion about high fidelity Housing First approaches and low fidelity Housing First approaches. We know that the closer fidelity to the model is maintained, the better the outcomes are likely to be⁸. Once we start accepting lower fidelity services as part of the Housing First landscape, we are concerned that this will begin to erode the evidence base on Housing First and therefore trust in the model.

Available from: https://www.feantsaresearch.org/public/user/Observatory/2023/EJH_17%20-%201/EJH_17-1_A4_v0242.pdf

⁶ Johnsen, S., Blenkinsopp, J. & Rayment, M. 2022, Scotland's Housing First Pathfinder Evaluation: Final Report. Heriot-Watt University, Edinburgh. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.17861/8GJ7-SV28>

⁷ Bretherton, J and Pleave, N, Housing First in England: An Evaluation of Nine Services, 2015, University of York and Centre for Housing Policy. Available from: <https://www.york.ac.uk/media/chp/documents/2015/Housing%20First%20England%20Report%20February%202015.pdf>

⁸ Davidson, C., Neighbors, C., Hall, G., Hogue, A., Cho, R., Kutner, B., and Morgenstern, J. (2014) Association of Housing First Implementation and Key Outcomes Among Homeless Persons with Problematic Substance Use, *Psychiatr Serv.* 65(11) pp.1318-1324. Available from: <https://psyciatryonline.org/doi/full/10.1176/appi.ps.201300195>

At TPS, we provide quite a few housing support services using different models. We believe that they are all good quality services – but they’re not all Housing First. As Housing First does become more mainstream, we must ensure that it does not become the label used for almost any housing support service, or to signify that it is a “quality” housing support service – that it continues to mean a specific approach of providing settled, mainstream housing with wrap around, flexible support with low case loads for as long as it is wanted and with support and housing clearly separated.

MORE THAN HOUSING, AND MORE THAN HOMELESSNESS

Housing First is still seen as, primarily, a housing service. In New York, where Housing First was developed by Sam Tsemberis at Pathways⁹, it was set up as a holistic service, with clear separation between housing and treatment or other services. TPS translated this vision to Scotland by embedding the principles that housing and support are separate, and housing is not conditional on accepting support.

As a service for people with multiple and complex needs, Housing First needs to coordinate support from many agencies – but it cannot provide those specialist services single-handedly. There needs to be more and better coordination and cooperation from other services.

In Scotland, it is still difficult even after 15 years, to get joint funding from other agencies like health, social work and justice.

Increasingly, we are recognising that the job of convincing people that Housing First is not just a housing service is far from done. In order to deliver true Housing First for those who need it, we need to ensure that Housing First is not an add on service operating in isolation. The system needs to change and adapt to coordinate support, including Housing First, around people. Housing First is an important element of the system but it cannot provide what is really needed – systems change.

LOOKING AHEAD

The longer we have delivered Housing First the more we recognised that, while this approach works for the vast majority of people, it is not wanted, hasn’t worked or has been assessed as unsuitable for a small but hugely important group of people. Some people who fall into this group have health or care needs that cannot and should not be getting met by homelessness and housing services. At TPS, we have started exploring developing a settled supported accommodation offer to fill that gap.

⁹ Pathways Housing First - <https://www.pathwayshousingfirst.org/>



HOUSING FIRST HELPS TO MAKE A HOUSE A HOME

E was referred to Renfrewshire Housing First during a really challenging period in his life. He was experiencing homelessness, tackling alcohol and other drug use, and experiencing poor mental health whilst navigating the death of a very close relative. E was well known to services in Renfrewshire and a decision was made to refer to Housing First.

The support started out at E's pace and gave him time to understand the level of support he would get from the service. This also enabled E to build a rapport with his allocated worker and make informed choices on how he wanted his support delivered. During this initial period a comprehensive support plan was put in place, this support plan was the main areas that E wished to be supported with and the guidance for support moving forward.

E was initially supported to address his ongoing substance use- this included home visits from ADRS and support from staff to attend appointments with them. E was then supported to plan his days, this was set days for cleaning, washings, shopping and managing the daily tasks of living. A timetable was set up and support and prompting from staff allowed E to adapt to the routine. Staff also helped E to access all the benefits to which he was entitled. The support was flexible and available when E required it and through time E requested to lower his support days and keep in contact via telephone if anything came up. This meant E went from daily support, to being seen twice a week with phone calls in between.

A permanent offer of housing was made in a fantastic area which E accepted, he received full resettlement support from staff and took on tasks himself. E received his Community Care Grant but was also proactive in picking up items to make his house a home. Once E was resettled, he re-ignited his love of arts and crafts and would often build various ornaments from wood, plastic and metal. During this period E mentioned a specific machine that he would need for his next project and was in the process of saving up. The staff team applied for the Make it Happen fund (an internal fund for people supported by Turning Point Scotland) and E was awarded funding to buy the machine he required for his hobby.

E's achievements are held as among the best outcomes that Housing First has seen in Renfrewshire, the flexibility of support that responds to the persons needs is paramount. E eventually requested to be closed by the service as he remained abstinent, was managing his tenancy, found opportunities within the community to engage with and had met a new partner. E advised at his closing review that had he known of Housing First sooner he would have jumped at the chance of this support. He was extremely grateful for the support he received but also how flexible and adaptive the support was to his needs. He stated he would never have been able to navigate all the appointments related to his wellbeing, health and daily living which would have had a detrimental effect to him had the support not been there.

WHAT DOES SUCCESS REALLY MEAN?

When we talk about success in Housing First, we always ask, who are we defining success for? Is it success for Scottish Government, elected members, officers within the council, the service delivery organisation or people who receive support? For each stakeholder we believe that success looks very different.

For housing officers and homelessness teams, the most important outcome might be tenancy sustainment and a lack of housing related debt; for health services, it might be for people to engage with their services earlier and more regularly; for elected members, a reduction in the number of people who are sleeping rough; for justice teams, it might mean successfully completing license conditions. In contrast, for the individual, success might be a feeling of safety, relationships with family and friends and/or being valued in their community. While these outcomes are not contradictory, they are also not as complementary as they could be. We tend to find it easier to measure the hard outcomes about registering with a GP and maintaining a tenancy for 6 months than we do the softer outcomes about the quality of a person's life. And because of this, we lean towards measuring some outcomes and not others.

Since 2021, the Scottish Government has produced quarterly monitoring reports on the growth and pattern of Housing First tenancies across Scotland¹⁰. The monitor reports on tenancy sustainment, household demographics, referral routes and support needs, amongst other things. These reports are incredibly useful, and have helped to highlight trends, like the growing number of children being included in a Housing First tenancy. However, we believe they can be strengthened.

The only outcome we are measuring at a national level is tenancy sustainment. At TPS, we hear from many Housing First services that we are measuring this quite crudely. If a tenancy ends for any reason, it counts as a “failed” tenancy, when in some cases that tenancy ending might be a positive or necessary step for the person. We would like to see a continuation of the approach taken in the Housing First Pathfinder Evaluation, which reported differentiated between reasons for tenancies ending¹¹.

Measuring a wider range of outcomes, including the softer outcomes like quality of relationships and integration with the wider community, would give us a richer picture of what success looks like for Housing First. Including outcomes and indicators related to health, justice, alcohol and other drugs and other social care services would reinforce that Housing First is an approach that requires coordination but also delivers outcomes across different sectors. These outcomes and indicators would add weight to what the evidence has already shown us about Housing First – that it is an approach that works for housing stability as well as just about every other aspect of a person's health and wellbeing.

¹⁰ Housing First: Monitoring reports. <https://www.gov.scot/publications/housing-first-monitoring-reports/>

¹¹ Johnsen, S, Blenkinsopp, J & Rayment, M 2022, Scotland's Housing First Pathfinder Evaluation: Final Report. Heriot-Watt University, Edinburgh. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.17861/8GJ7-SV28> (table 5.2)

SUPPORTING PEOPLE WITHOUT CONDITIONS

The Aberdeen Housing First service began supporting F in October 2021, following on from the Housing First Pathfinder service in Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire.

F has a history of cyclical homelessness, predominantly due abusive relationships, justice system involvement and use of alcohol and other drugs which led to her being cuckooed. While F had already begun a prescription of methadone, she found it difficult to stop taking unprescribed drugs.

F was initially in a private let, which was not suitable for her physical health needs. She had a stroke several years ago, leaving her weak down one half of her body. She also has COPD. During support appointments, we noticed a hand tremor which made it difficult for F to manage basic tasks and maintaining her property. We supported her to see her GP where a referral went through to Neurology. F was diagnosed with a neuro functional disorder often associated with abuse and trauma in childhood.

We supported F to get a housing needs assessment and to set up a payment plan for rent arrears for a past tenancy with a local housing association. Because of her health issues, F was given high priority for amenity housing. During the wait for new accommodation, we helped to arrange a cleaner to help F maintain her tenancy.

During the wait, F received a significant amount of money from back dated benefits. Some associates of F found out about this and began to extort some of this money from F, while also providing her with pregabalin and other street drugs.

She experienced a near fatal overdose and was taken away from the property in an ambulance. As there were concerns about the circumstances surrounding this, we submitted an adult support and protection referral, which resulted in F being appointed a care manager.

F had a long stay in hospital due to health concerns related to the overdose, and her discharge was delayed due to the unsuitability of her tenancy and her vulnerability to people in the local community. During her stay in hospital, F stabilised her medication and is determined to continue on this positive path, with her goal being to reduce her methadone prescription.

Aberdeen Housing First initiated and maintained regular liaison with care management, integrated drug service and local authority housing to ensure safeguarding for F as well as suitable follow-on care and accommodation.

F was discharged from hospital to a local rehabilitation unit, before being allocated permanent amenity accommodation. We supported F to furnish and move into this tenancy, which has become her home. While in hospital F was also able to rebuild her relationship with her sister, who is now providing family support.

A GROWING EVIDENCE BASE

The Housing First Pathfinder (HFP) programme ran from 2019 to 2022 across five urban areas – Glasgow, Edinburgh, Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire, Dundee, and Stirling. It worked to make Housing First a reality on a much bigger scale than had previously been known, serving as a key test of the opportunities and challenges involved in the delivery of Housing First in Scotland.

The HFP helped to prove that, with sufficient investment, it is possible to scale Housing First nationally. Crucially, the HFP was also independently evaluated, helping to build evidence about how well Housing First works in Scotland and the rest of the UK. The 579 individuals supported through the HFP achieved a 12 month tenancy sustainment rate of 88 %, and an 80 % sustainment rate at 24 months¹². Beyond housing outcomes, the HFP and programme was a success in supporting the wider needs of service users, who reported that the flexibility and open ended nature of Housing First helped them to engage with support, keep their tenancy and begin to recover from problematic substance use.

The Housing First monitoring reports¹³ have continued to report on the number of Housing First tenancies in Scotland. Since the HFP began in 2021, 2,040 Housing First tenancies have started across Scotland at 30th September 2024. Tenancy sustainment rates have stayed high at 85 % over 12 months after entry. These reports have also helped to show who is entering Housing First tenancies and highlighted some interesting trends like the rise in the number of children living in these tenancies. We know that almost 200 children are living with their parent or guardian in a Housing First tenancy and even more households have access to children but without fulltime custody. These trends are not only interesting, they help to show that Housing First is helping people to stabilise their lives and nurturing closer family relationships.

The HFP programme demonstrated that Housing First works to prevent repeat homelessness, helping people who had never stayed in a tenancy for any period of time, to maintain tenancies for years. However, some challenges were also becoming clear. Housing First is not immune to the pressures that exist across Scotland for social housing supply and quality. The low supply of social housing stock meant limited choice and sometimes a long wait for housing and a lack of true buy in from other agencies meant that Housing First remains, in some areas a housing led service that, at best, coordinates wrap around support.

¹² Scottish Government, Learning From 25 years of preventative interventions in Scotland, June 2025. Available from : <https://www.gov.scot/publications/learning-25-years-preventative-interventions-scotland/pages/18/>

¹³ Housing First: monitoring reports. Available from: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/housing-first-monitoring-reports/>

The average time from referral to permanent Housing First tenancy has reduced over time but is still 255 days – over 8 months. This is almost as high as the average number of days that a non-Housing First household spends in temporary accommodation in Scotland. It is clear that the Housing Emergency and the short supply of social housing stock is being felt as much within Housing First as it is across the entire housing system. However, we recognise that one of the key principles of Housing First is that settled housing is provided as quickly as possible. Without this key element, we must question whether we are truly delivering Housing First.

Drawing on what was learned during the HFP programme, the ‘Branching Out’ framework was launched, serving as a roadmap for the delivery and scaling up of Housing First across Scotland. The analysis in the initial report and in subsequent reports shows that, while provision of Housing First services continues to increase, we are still not even close to meeting demand. The 2024 update of Branching Out estimates that Scotland needs about 3,500 new Housing First tenancies each year across all local authorities. We’re collectively delivering only a small portion of that number.

We have found that, for most people, progress towards their goals is not linear. While we have found that the majority of people receiving Housing First services do move on, no longer wanting support, after between 2 and 5 years of support, their lives and sometimes their goals can change during this time. The flexible, open ended and persistent nature of Housing First is key to sticking with people as they change and supporting them wherever their life goes. It is in these individual stories that we truly find the value that Housing First services can deliver to people and to communities.



Photo: <https://chi.resourcespace.com/pages/home.php>

¹⁴ Housing First Monitoring Reports, 1 October 2024 to 31 March 2025 Available from: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/housing-first-monitoring-reports/pages/1-october-2024-to-31-march-2025/>

¹⁵ BBC News, Scottish Government declares housing emergency, May 2024 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c4n11j180lzo>

¹⁶ Branching Out: A National Framework to start-up and scale-up Housing First in Scotland, 2021-2031 Available from: <https://homelessnetwork.scot/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/National-Framework-July-100724.pdf>

¹⁷ Housing First Scotland Annual Check-up 2022. Available from: https://homelessnetwork.scot/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/Housing-First-Scotland-2022_web1-2.pdf

SMALL CHANGES MAKE A BIG IMPACT

B is a female in her early 30's, she is a single mother but only has limited access to her son. B has a history of problematic use of drugs and alcohol, combined with physical and mental health problems. She lives in Dumfries.

B was struggling to engage with her previous worker, so when I became her worker, we built things up slowly. I spent time getting to know her situation now and where her life was at both her contact with her son and with her health. B knew that, to get more access to her son, she had to get herself and her house in better order. Her hope was to have him return to her permanently. I spent a lot of time helping her to understand the differences she knew she had to make within her home to allow this to move forward, so over the next few meetings we came up with a plan of where to start and how to move ahead.

We started with small easy chunks that she felt able to complete with my full support onside, on day one we filled bin bags with rubbish then we decided on two tasks she could manage on her own before my met on our next visit and agreed a timescale that would work for her.

When I returned, B had managed to do the tasks and a little more, she was really excited to show me and my colleague what she had done. She was glowing with pride. We were able to achieve a lot more after that. She emptied out her wardrobe and sorted through everything and she used some boxes she had to repack things. We left B to continue while we went to purchase more storage boxes and when we returned B had sorted through even more of her belongings.

We arrived back with some lunch for us all and sat outside in her garden to have a break. B was so excited, by what she had achieved. She pulled out some old garden furniture for us all and was chatty and excited to make further plans for more work in her house.

B had also moved her dog's bed and food from the bedroom to the kitchen. We helped her to clean and sort the kitchen out so that when her Housing Officer visited she could see the changes in not only the property but also how B presented.

B will continue to have ups and downs due to her mental health but knows now just what she can achieve and that we are there to support her.

‘SUPPORT IS THERE FOR ME WHEN I NEED IT AND THEY CARE ABOUT ME’

A is a vulnerable male in his mid 30's with multiple complex needs spanning health, alcohol and other drugs, justice and homelessness. He lives in Perth.

Prior to support from the Intensive Housing Support Team (IHS) A's engagement with services has been limited with periods of non-engagement and A falling into regular periods of crisis resulting in either admission to mental health hospital or prison stays.

When first working with the service A identified his long-term goals to set up home with his partner and go on holidays together. They were supported from temporary accommodation into permanent tenancy and with ongoing input there was a period of relative stability for A. A's partner then unexpectedly passed away within their home resulting in a decline in his mental health, during the crisis a multi-agency approach was able to be taken, bringing together agencies from multiple disciplines to ensure that A remained as safe as possible. This crisis ultimately resulted in a return to prison for A and him choosing to leave his permanent home and return to temporary accommodation due to the trauma being there brought about for him. On paper this statistic is seen as a failure however staying within the property would have continued to add further trauma for A so it was imperative for his wellbeing that he ended this tenancy and returned to temporary accommodation.

During this most recent prison stay and collaborative working across multiple disciplines it was established that A was at high risk from those around him and also his own choices. This resulted in further connection with mental health services, support was then able to accompany A to engage with appointments which determined him to lack capacity.

Without the assertive outreach approach of IHS support, going out and finding A, encouraging and supporting him to attend his appointments he would have continued to fall under the radar of services, being classed as choosing not to engage which would have led to further crises for him and potentially death.



IS HIGH FIDELITY REALLY THAT IMPORTANT?

We know that the higher the fidelity to the Housing First approach, the better the outcomes for people we support¹⁸. Prof Sarah Johnsen argues that what makes Housing First successful is the adherence to four key principles: longevity, flexibility, stickability and normality¹⁹. When a Housing First approach was first implemented in Scotland, there was a significant focus on ensuring we delivered a ‘high fidelity’ approach, sticking as closely to the principles of Housing First as possible.

Within Turning Point Scotland we have, over the years, decided that we had to have some flexibility in our stance on high fidelity as we recognised the pressures that local authorities were under and the realities of delivering a service in the real world. As we talked about in our 10 yrs of Housing First paper²⁰, we have our own ‘non-negotiables’, taken from Homeless Link (footnote) when it comes to how Housing First services should be run. These were red lines for us that if we crossed them then we would really need to consider our involvement in the service. They are very similar to the key principles that Prof Johnsen talks about – support is not time limited, tenure is secure, access to a home is not conditional on support, case loads should remain low, and housing first should be for people experiencing multiple and enduring support needs.

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1 PEOPLE HAVE A RIGHT TO A SETTLED HOME



2 FLEXIBLE SUPPORT FOR AS LONG AS IT IS NEEDED



3 HOUSING AND SUPPORT ARE SEPARATED



4 INDIVIDUALS HAVE CHOICE AND CONTROL



5 AN ASSERTIVE ENGAGEMENT APPROACH (STICKY SUPPORT) IS USED



6 SUPPORT IS DELIVERED BASED ON PEOPLE'S STRENGTHS, INDIVIDUAL GOALS AND ASPIRATIONS



7 A HARM REDUCTION APPROACH IS USED

¹⁸ Mackie, P, Johnsen, S, and Wood, J, Ending rough sleeping: what works? An international evidence review, 2017, Crisis. Available from: https://www.crisis.org.uk/media/238368/ending_rough_sleeping_what_works_2017.pdf

¹⁹ Johnsen, S, Why does Housing First work?, blog posted on March 19, 2018 Available from: <https://i-sphere.site.hw.ac.uk/2018/03/19/why-does-housing-first-work/#:~:text=extent%20they%20desire.,Why%20does%20Housing%20First%20work%3F,or%20dismissive%20relationship%20with%20care.>

²⁰ Turning Point Scotland, 10 Years and Key Messages, 2020 Available from: <https://turningpointscotland.com/homelessness-and-prevention-turning-point-scotland-now-and-the-future/>

²¹ Homeless Link, Developing Housing First: The non-negotiables. Available from: http://cdn-homelesslink-production.s3-website-eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/media/documents/Housing_First_non-negotiables_1TXdU57.pdf

We've seen Housing First move from a pilot idea, through the Pathfinder process to a mainstream response to homelessness for people experiencing multiple and complex needs. We have delivered the service in small settings that have then needed to be scaled up as the model proved its worth and was expanded. This is still a work in progress, and we need to move more quickly.

Our experience is that there are sticking points, but most local authorities work through these and they shift over time as the service becomes more embedded. This was an experience that was shared by other providers during the HFP.

We have used shared language with the local authority in Fife when talking about the process of scaling up Housing First, referencing 'Growing Pains'. We haven't used that in a negative way, it is used to describe how the systems that support and help or hinder Housing First develop from supporting just over 30 people towards closer to 150. It is recognised by the local authority that the services need two to three years to mature, ensuring Housing First can flourish within the wider system, linking closely to our views on systems fidelity.

We have frequently seen Housing First struggle to integrate into a local authority area. Most of the time, the system slowly works through these challenges. But we have seen others which have stagnated – and we don't use this word lightly - fail. If there is no buy in from the wider system, Housing First will fail. Housing First flourishes where there is an adequately resourced steering group with an agreed action plan around the vision and direction of the work, ensuring we address challenges and help the scale up process. This is especially evident in Fife, where it feels like the real definition of a partnership. However, this does not mean that we are not having difficult conversations with each other. It does mean that we all don't get dragged down by specific issues. But we continue to remember the wider vision we all have for the work and people we support and we are all driven to achieve this vision. These steering groups are crucial to the implementation and scaling up of Housing First locally and, we feel, would be equally useful on a national level to drive the expansion of Housing First.

One major obstacle that we think needs to be addressed is that whilst we have often delivered a number of training sessions on Housing First in areas (Intro to Housing First, HF for Practitioners and HF for Managers), churn within the wider system and passage of time means people forget what Housing First is and they may not feel like they have the right pathways to raise issues about the direction of Housing First locally. We believe that there needs to be an emphasis on a continuous roll out of Housing First training in each local authority to ensure that people understand the principles, they can help us achieve fidelity to the model and systems fidelity on an ongoing basis.

The issue of direction of Housing First locally being driven by a steering group is just as relevant on a national level. Colleagues in Europe have stated that they look to Scotland as an example of good practice. We believe we would benefit from a

²² Johnsen, S, Blenkinsopp, J & Rayment, M, Gaining and Preserving Pioneer Status: Key Lessons from the Housing First Pathfinder Programme in Scotland, European Journal of Homelessness _ Volume 17, No. 1 _ 2023
Available from: https://www.feantsaresearch.org/public/user/Observatory/2023/EJH_17%20-%201/EJH_17-1_A4_v0242.pdf

cross sectoral national steering group to lead and champion the diverse challenges and opportunities that arise. A national steering group on Housing First would help to drive, guide and nurture the scaling up of Housing First in Scotland while holding both service and the system to account for quality and fidelity.

Over the years of delivering Housing First services, we have sometimes needed to have some tough conversations with commissioners about how a Housing First service is being delivered. We will always stand by the principles of Housing First and our ‘non-negotiables’ around delivery but we have begun to take a more flexible approach to aspects of Housing First services. While Housing First is designed as a response to homelessness and, we believe, should be the default response for those experiencing homelessness with multiple and enduring support needs, we are now also delivering some intensive housing support services focussed on preventing homelessness. These do not involve provision of housing to someone experiencing homelessness but still follow many of the Housing First principles in that in that they are not time limited, they support people in a flexible, person centred way and provide ‘sticky’ support that can and does follow people wherever they are.



Photo: <https://chi.resourcespace.com/pages/home.php>

PERTH INTENSIVE HOUSING SUPPORT SERVICE

Our Intensive Housing Support Service in Perth was designed as a Housing First service but it also offers prevention support for people who are currently in a tenancy. This flexibility and increased remit for the service has allowed it to serve more people, at every stage of a person's journey. The service is able to continue to support people as they move tenancies, including into and out of custodial sentences.

"Never had the opportunity for support in prison before. It has made a massive difference already. I feel reassured, supported and valued. It's easier to access housing, benefits. I have never been asked about what I want in life and feel that this matters as throughout my life I have failed, judged and looked down at"

Service User in Perth Intensive Housing Support Service

Feedback from those using the service has consistently highlighted the importance of feeling valued and support being consistent and persistent. As with other services using a Housing First approach, having a trusted, positive, and non-judgemental approach is crucial. However, we've found that the most important quality of support is that it is persistent – workers continue to go back and offer support over and over again.

Our Perth Intensive Housing Support Service is included in the national Housing First statistics collected by Scottish Government. We've previously argued that it should not be included because it's not purely a Housing First service – as it provides support for people who are already in tenancies. Over the last few years, however, we've become more relaxed in this stance. TPS will continue to argue for high fidelity Housing First services but we have shifted our thinking based on what we think is really important. We will continue to stand by our 'non-negotiables' but we are open to using a Housing First approach to work with people where and when it works for them, whether they are currently experiencing homelessness or in a tenancy. We also recognise that the Housing First approach of flexibility and stickability are almost universally applicable to anyone who needs support.

However, we believe that our definitions and language matter. We need to be consistent in what we are calling Housing First and the data we gather about Housing First services. We believe that there should be a more open conversation about the definition and essential criteria needed to be called a Housing First service and counted in the national data. We know that there is inconsistency in what is labelled as a Housing Service and what we are counting as a Housing First tenancy. Without this open conversation, we will be potentially watering down the definition, the quality of our data and the meaningfulness of our evidence.

PROTECTING FIDELITY

As financial pressures increase on local authorities, we recognise the pressures to have throughput in Housing First. Our experience is that the majority of people who do move on from Housing First, move on between 2 and 5 years after engaging with Housing First support. Some move on sooner or much later, while others will need high level support indefinitely either through Housing First, or through an adult care assessment or Self Directed Support.

We have started paying a lot more attention to throughput in our Housing First services and have begun to analyse the patterns of support for each person in our services, estimating what level of support they might need in the near and medium term and planning for service capacity and vacancies. This has been particularly successful where it is done as part of referral and support planning, where there is no external pressure for throughput in the service.

GOALS CHANGE OVER TIME – AND HOUSING FIRST SUPPORT CHANGES AS WELL

Service user ‘S’ was referred to the service as a vulnerable young woman. She lives in Glasgow. She has multiple complex needs and has lived through many traumatic experiences. S had been asked to leave the family home and found herself homeless. She became involved in using Class A drugs and found herself being abused and coerced by older men who had gained her trust by portraying that they cared for her. It was at this point she was referred for Housing First support. Due to her young age, S had trust issues as well as resentment of “authority”. Establishing a relationship with her was a very difficult process but after many months of consistency and patience, she began to accept the support.

S received wraparound support from a variety of services, she was open to ADRS who had started Opioid Replacement Treatment (ORT) with her. She quickly and successfully managed to become abstinent from illicit substances and in turn, the medication. S was determined that she did not wish to be in treatment for a long period of time. S was also in receipt of mental health support as well as mood stabilising medication. S got a tenancy and received Housing First support throughout her time within the tenancy, however, she then became involved with another older male who became abusive towards her in a short space of time. He assaulted her, causing her to flee the tenancy and having to return to homeless accommodation. This was a setback in S’s overall progress and goals. S got a new tenancy in a new area and she showed how resilient she had become. She had progressed in so many ways on a personal level and demonstrated a willingness to work with services thanks to the positive experiences she had with not only Housing First but the other agencies involved in her support through what she described as “rock bottom”.

S’s goal was to be able to live in her tenancy, independently, without support and this was achieved. She now has a dog and a part time job, which is a step towards her new goal of full-time employment.

Being able to flex support up and down over time is a key principle of Housing First. In Glasgow and Renfrewshire, we have implemented an approach where, as someone's supports needs change, we aim to transition the support from a lead practitioner over to a support practitioner, who will continue support whilst linking in with the lead practitioner. This frees up capacity for Housing First workers to take on more high-level needs referrals. This is only possible in a service that allows us to integrate Housing First and Housing Support. We would not consider transferring a person to a new service outside of the organisation as their needs change to be trauma informed or ethical. But, designing a service where support can flex up and down while being delivered by a core team, for us, fits into a high fidelity Housing First approach. Whilst we believe strongly in keeping the identity of both Housing First and visiting housing support, we believe that high fidelity can be maintained whilst considering capacity challenges within local authorities, the desire to have throughput through services, and of allowing more people to access Housing First support.

WHAT IS SYSTEMS FIDELITY?

We hear from colleagues in Finland that, even where Housing First is deeply embedded in the system, it's fidelity can still be fragile. We realised very quickly in the early years of Housing First in Scotland that focussing on fidelity to the approach was not enough to help Housing First to flourish. We needed to focus on the system around Housing First. Over the years, we have talked about the importance of 'fidelity to the approach' and how we cannot think that the job is done when Housing First is introduced. As we delivered this approach we touched, bounced off or and grated against other parts of the system that helped or hindered us. We realised that we could not change the system by just introducing a new service or approach, rather, we had to focus on how that service interacted with the wider system and, in turn, how the system interacted with the service and the individuals supported by Housing First.

Demos Helsinki argues that Housing First should not be perceived as a roadmap with a clear path to solving the complex issue of homelessness. Instead, it should be seen as a compass, or a set of principles to guide the entire system.

Instead of being seen as a map, HF can provide governments and practitioners with a compass, allowing them to chart their own journey through the challenge of homelessness. The HF model comes with a set of principles, a selection of which may function as the compass' cardinal directions – such as housing as a human right; separation of housing and treatment; choice and control for users; and active engagement without coercion – and leave ample room for flexible implementation. As a result, this shift in perspective would entail moving away from seeing HF as a policy roadmap aimed to ensure the perfect implementation of a given operating model, and a new approach to HF as a governance model – one serving as a broad baseline for ending homelessness²³.

²³ Demos Helsinki and Housing First Europe Hub, A new systems perspective to ending homelessness, 2022. Available from: <https://demoshelsinki.fi/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/HF-Systems-Change-Report.pdf>

For many years, it has felt like Housing First services are bouncing off the system from within. At times, we have been able to reshape some parts of the system from the inside while other times, it has felt like bouncing off a brick wall. We have realised that it is not possible to change or reshape a system from within services alone. Housing First had given us the platform to engage with the rest of the system and start these change processes, but it wasn't going to be enough. We needed to change the rest of the system.

This led us to a multiyear test of change with Fife Council focussing on a Whole System Approach²⁴. The TPS Board and Fife council entered a partnership, funding a vision to change the system to work to end homelessness and support people to thrive in a place that they call home.

Changing the system to support Housing First to flourish was part of the remit, but there are so many other elements that had to be considered. Whilst Housing First gave us this platform to take forward this next stage in changing the system, we had to take a significantly wider approach to systems change. Both partners have committed financial resources as well as significant time to the partnership. There has been bold leadership from Fife Council to recognise what is going well within the system, what needs to improve and begin to implement processes to make that change happen.

We are excited with the initial development of this project including hiring two Community Navigators to work with people in the community to help them navigate the system and to highlight where there are barriers that people are facing. We think this partnership approach, with partners that are truly open to change, will provide a blueprint for implementing the incoming Ask and Act Duties²⁵.

²⁴ Indigo House, Learning Partner Inception Report, March 2025 Available from: <https://turningpointscotland.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/Learning-Partner-Inception-Report.pdf>

²⁵ Housing (Scotland) Bill. Available from: <https://www.parliament.scot/bills-and-laws/bills/s6/housing-scotland-bill-session-6>

‘ I AM ABLE TO SPEAK FREELY AND MADE FEEL COMFORTABLE. MY SUPPORT IS FOR ME. I WOULDN’T BE HERE TODAY WITHOUT MY SUPPORT’

M was one of Fife’s first referrals. His referral stated that he had experienced homelessness, taken prescription medications, frequently presented at A&E, accessed psychiatric care in a hospital setting, received a mental health diagnosis or struggled with potential mental health concerns, used substances recreationally, voiced concern surrounding drug or alcohol use, experienced violence, or been violent to others, experienced imprisonment, had been banned or evicted from other services, experienced physical health challenge(s) and experienced a cognitive challenge, and required 2-1 support.

He was sofa surfing when we first met with him as he had been banned from B&B temp accommodation due to his behaviour. At the initial assessment it was identified his “behaviours” were a result of his coping mechanisms around his mental health, and this was greatly impacted by his living conditions. Within 2 weeks of his initial assessment he was offered a temp flat, and was offered his permanent accommodation a few months later. Once we got to know M, his support was reduced from 2-1 support to 1-1 support as he was not displaying any aggression, or agitation with his support.

He was also at this time being supported by another service to help him address and manage his alcohol and drug consumption. He engaged well with this and was discharged from this support as he was maintaining his usage to a minimum, and his use was not impacting in his day-to-day life.

Consistency and building of positive working relationship, meant that M was getting ready to step down in support. However, as this was getting closer, M began to feel more anxious and concerned about this change. He began to use more alcohol to manage these feelings.

When staff raised their concerns with M, he confirmed he had not been coping as well as he thought he would. M and the staff decided to continue support without any step down and initially increased support for a few weeks to support him back into support from alcohol and other drug services. M says that the support he receives has given him confidence to ask for help, where previously he would “bury his head in the sand.”

SCALING UP: HOUSING FIRST, NOT HOUSING ONLY

When TPS first introduced Housing First to the UK, it was not intended to be a housing intervention. For Housing First to be successful, it needs to be a fully integrated service, with involvement from health, social care, justice and housing. Perhaps, by calling it Housing First, we diluted that message; we made it easier for other services to step away, knowing that people would continue to be supported. Perhaps, Housing First services and workers have become too good at papering over the cracks.

We need Housing First to be seen as and treated as Health and Social Care response to homelessness with complex needs. This means it should be jointly funded and developed by and with involvement from justice, health, social care and housing. Even after 15 years, Housing First is almost universally funded by housing and homelessness with, at best, involvement from other services. There is still much progress to be made to deliver Housing First as it was intended.

WRAP AROUND SUPPORT IS DELIVERED BY A TEAM

In more recent years, we started to reflect on the language we and other people were using to speak about Housing First. We used to talk about Housing First being a ‘wrap around support service’ but it cannot provide wrap around support alone.

Housing First workers are great at knowing a little about a lot of different areas and are able to connect people to other services by building trust and providing consistency. They are experts in delivering support through a Housing First approach, but they are not specialist mental health workers, specialist alcohol and other drugs workers, or specialist justice workers. Now more than ever, we hear about partners within mental health, alcohol and other drugs or other services walking away from support as the housing first worker ‘has got it’ - they consider the Housing First worker to be responsible for meeting that individual’s needs. Housing First is not a wraparound service where the Housing First worker delivers all the support. Our role, often as the lead professional, is to ensure that all partners including ourselves, are held to account and to coordinate the collective delivery of a wraparound service.

Some Housing First services that TPS delivers have developed very effective referral panels that help to ensure that all partners are involved.

ABERDEEN HOUSING FIRST TRIAGE PANEL

The Aberdeen Housing First triage panel is comprised of representatives from different agencies, including TPS and Aberdeen City Council. The purpose of this panel is to assess all Housing First referrals to ensure they meet the criteria and that we are the right support for individuals, thus ensuring the fidelity of the Housing First model.

When a referral is accepted by the triage panel, referrers are asked to explain the support provided, clarify if this support is wanted and seek the individual's consent for us to then offer support. This is done after referral to avoid 'false hope' if individuals are referred but do not meet the Housing First criteria.

The triage panel make it very clear that Housing First support will be offered to enhance the support individuals already receive, rather than being a replacement for other supports.

On occasion we have found that other agencies look to withdraw support when Housing First support is agreed. In these cases, we arrange case discussions with all agencies involved, clarifying that Housing First is essentially intensive housing support, but individuals need continued support from all relevant agencies.

We have found that it is crucial for a range of services to be involved in Housing First and we believe that this would be best achieved by joint funding. We believe that the continuation in many local authority areas of Housing First being funded by Housing and Homelessness teams perpetuates the issue of Housing First being seen as purely a Housing service.

Joint funding has remained an issue, even in areas where there is a desire to pool resources. One local authority was very keen to partly fund Housing First from their Justice budget but this proved to be too challenging to implement in practice, partly because the justice budget is only funded one year at a time. They could not commit to funding anything longer than a year and it was often well after the start of the financial year before they could make certain decisions on their budgets. We have heard of proposal from one local authority to 'top slice' budgets from Housing, Mental Health, Justice, Alcohol and other Drugs to pay for the Housing First service as it was increasingly seen as a crucial approach to supporting people with complex needs but, as far as we know, this funding approach hasn't happened yet. Continued exploration of how other services are involved in and bought into Housing First feels timeous considering the new prevention and Ask and Act duties in the recently passed Housing (Scotland) Bill²⁶.

²⁶ Housing (Scotland) Bill <https://www.parliament.scot/bills-and-laws/bills/s6/housing-scotland-bill-session-6>

These issues around inflexibility of other services were highlighted especially clearly in the evaluation of the HFP:

The extent to which the potential benefits of Housing First were able to be realised were constrained by the limited availability and inflexibility of many other health and social care services that Housing First projects work in conjunction with. Pathfinder projects helped service users navigate what are often complex systems, but gaps in provision and barriers to service access remained, with difficulties accessing mental healthcare being especially acute. Collective problem-solving was key to overcoming many such challenges, but the resolution of issues often hinged on personal relationships between and/or the goodwill of individual stakeholders. This underscores the need for broader systems change to overcome the systemic and structural barriers to treatment that the target population continues to face²⁷.

We know that Housing First works but we will not see the full benefits until we have full buy in from other parts of the Health and Social care system, with other services meeting individuals' needs in conjunction with Housing First services.

There are parts of the system that are embracing Housing First and we have partnership within local authorities where this is evidenced very well. One example is the involvement of Justice within Perth and Kinross.

²⁷ Johnsen, S, Blenkinsopp, J & Rayment, M 2022, Scotland's Housing First Pathfinder Evaluation: Final Report. Heriot-Watt University, Edinburgh. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.17861/8GJ7-SV28>

“I THINK I WOULD HAVE GONE TO PRISON IN MARCH IF I DIDN'T HAVE HIM [IHS SUPPORT WORKER], HE MADE SURE I WAS GOING TO APPOINTMENTS AND HE WAS IN COURT WITH ME THE WHOLE TIME”

C is a male in his fifties with multiple complex needs around Health (physical and mental), Alcohol and other drugs, justice and tenancy sustainment including repeated history of homelessness. He lives in Perth.

C has been housed in several local authority properties from both temporary housing stock, hostels and permanent housing stock, due to a history of accidental and intentional fire raising it was a requirement for any property that was allocated to C to be adapted to meet not only his mobility needs but also to include safety features such as sprinkler system that would not only keep C safe but also those around him.

When C was first referred to the service he was not willing to engage fully with anyone, he was in hostel accommodation and regularly being given hourly checks due to substance use leading to fears of unintentional overdose. Persistent assertive outreach from his key worker led to them developing a positive relationship and C increasing his engagement to numerous times throughout the week.

C is now settled in a permanent home of his own that he has furnished and decorated to his tastes. He engages well with not only our service but also with, health, pharmacy and other third sector agencies.

When we started supporting C he had historic cases for wilful fire-raising & assault outstanding which recently were called to court and one was to be heard in another local area, C was advised to expect a lengthy custodial sentence which ordinarily would have led to him losing his home, mobility scooter and potentially the progress that he had made. With support from the service C was able to attend his court hearings and meetings with the solicitor and also obtain feedback from ourselves and another local service about the level of engagement and the changes that C has made to his day to day life and the potential detrimental impact that going to prison would have on this. The key worker for C engaged with local authority for a plan to be found in order for him to be able to return to his specially adapted home on his release from prison but also to allow the local authority to utilise the empty space should he be sentenced to a number of years in prison. When C's case was heard at court he was given a community-based order which meant he was not returning to prison and able to continue on his journey.

There have been set backs along the way during time with C but the support has helped him to ensure that his mental health needs are being met, his mobility issues are being supported and that he is using substances in a safer way than before. This has resulted in him developing positive relationships with the service and allowed him to engage fully with us and also the justice system. C has not been involved with the legal/justice system since starting with the service.

WHAT'S NEXT?

HOUSING FIRST ISN'T FOR EVERYONE

Housing First has proven itself as a very effective model for people experiencing homelessness and who have multiple and enduring support needs – providing ordinary and settled accommodation with the right support, from the right people, at the right time. But we now know that for some, Housing First does not work or isn't wanted – and this presents a need for another approach to fill that gap.

There are other examples where the system is not stepping up. Sometimes, this is about the wider system not providing support. We often come across individuals who are being supported by or have been referred to Housing First services who have been deemed as having 'capacity' by social work services but are struggling to manage their lives. In these circumstances, even where Housing First is not suitable or not wanted, it is, in reality, the only and last option. The Shared Spaces research found that there are between 2-5 % of people who are experiencing homelessness in Scotland where housing first is not wanted or hasn't worked²⁷.

RAPID REHOUSING when homelessness has not been prevented

- Mainstream housing
no floating support
- Mainstream housing
with floating support
- Housing First
- Supported with
on-site support

PREVENT HOMELESSNESS before it happens

Homeless Network Scotland



Around half of households who experience homelessness in Scotland also have support needs.

Around 2-5% might be best fit for long-term supported housing.

By comparison, around **10-15%** best fit for Housing First

²⁸ Shared Spaces Research Advisory Group, October 2021, Policy Position The future role of supported housing to prevent and respond to homelessness in Scotland. Available from: <https://homelessnetwork.scot/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/4.-Shared-Spaces-POLICY-POSITION-041021.pdf>

This figure does not include those people who are leaving prison, are stuck within hospital settings or are in their own tenancy and it is clear that they would not cope with or have been assessed as not being able to manage their own tenancy or they don't want their own tenancy. The Shared Spaces research was an effort to explore what housing options could be available for this group.

“We need to understand that for some people, this [supported housing] will be the right thing for them. It’s not that they have failed in a tenancy, it is that they have chosen to be here because this is the place they are more likely to flourish.” (Service provider) ²⁹

The Task and Finish Group on Supported Accommodation stated, ‘a different type of housing option is needed for a small but hugely important group of people who can’t maintain a mainstream housing option, or who don’t want it at this point in their lives. [...] Supported housing can play a key role in these cases’³⁰.

Alongside Housing First, we need settled high quality supported housing with no time limit and coordinated wrap around support as a housing option for this group to enable settled housing for as long as it is needed and wanted.

WHOLE SYSTEMS APPROACH

Homelessness is a complex and multi-faceted issue that cannot and will not be solved by Housing First alone. However, as noted above Housing First can provide a compass with principles that can guide us all towards preventing and ending homelessness, especially for those with the most complex needs.

Ending, preventing, or responding effectively to homelessness demands input from not only housing, but also from across the public service system. No one service, or approach is going to have all the answers. Housing First is a model of support that works because it is more than a housing response – its impact depends on a range of inputs like alcohol and other drug support, physical and mental health support, citizenship, and connection to the community.

Building on these relationships to create greater connection and integration can significantly improve the delivery and effectiveness of Housing First – and this is where a WSA becomes essential. In practical terms, a WSA means that everyone plays their part to prevent homelessness. For example, housing officers identify increasing rent arrears and make links with housing support services, GPs or A&E departments find deteriorating mental health and connect with treatment and support services, alcohol and other drug services become aware of domestic violence and make links with local support services. When a person seeks help or is identified as homeless, they are able to access the support they need regardless of which agency they are working with; that is, there is No Wrong Door.

²⁹ Homeless Network Scotland and Indigo House, Shared Spaces Final Research Report, September 2021. Available from: <https://homelessnetwork.scot/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Shared-Spaces-FINAL-Research-Report-AE290921-2.pdf>

³⁰ Supported Housing Task and Finish Group Final Report and Recommendations, July 2024 Available from: <https://www.gov.scot/binaries/content/documents/govscot/publications/advice-and-guidance/2025/03/supported-housing-task-finish-group-main-report/documents/supported-housing-task-finish-group-final-report-recommendations/supported-housing-task-finish-group-final-report-recommendations/govscot%3Adocument/supported-housing-task-finish-group-final-report-recommendations.pdf>

A Whole System Approach ensures that the support people need—often from multiple agencies—is coordinated. It starts with whole system thinking. Every service provider, strategic structure, individual person working to deliver support – we can all consider how we contribute to the wider system, how we can work better with other providers of support, and how that system could be strengthened. This may mean adapting the way we deliver services, changing how we use resources, and making or breaking connections. We can divert or change existing resources when a gap in the system becomes evident, and when that’s not enough we can collectively look to fund and create new services or posts.

Turning Point Scotland have been working in partnership with Fife Council to develop a ‘test of change’ to develop a WSA. This is not a linear process – it takes time to build relationships and align people and systems around a shared vision – but a WSA is about ‘making a start somewhere’, testing new ways of working, learning together, and expanding from there.

NATIONAL OVERSIGHT GROUP ON HOUSING FIRST

TPS brought Housing First to Scotland 15 years ago. Since then, Housing First has grown through the HFP programme, as a key element of the Ending Homelessness Together Action Plan, and funded through RRTPs. We have a good grasp of how and where Housing First is delivered and we also know that it’s incredibly successful at preventing repeat homelessness. Our national strategy, in the Ending Homelessness Together Plan includes a strong commitment to Housing First including to support the HFP and:

- Build on early results [in Housing First] and work with local authorities to scale up Housing First more rapidly
- Support local authorities with plans to deliver Housing First in their areas
- Forge partnerships with health and justice systems to embed Housing First ³¹

National statistics are gathered by the Scottish Government and Homeless Network Scotland publishes a check up on each Housing First service each year³². However, there is a lack of national coordination for the true scale up needed for Housing First. The Housing First Check Up process and report provides great insight into Housing First services across the country but it does not offer either a ‘carrot’ to services performing very well or a ‘stick’ for services that need to increase fidelity.

Despite the growth we have seen in Housing First provision, delivery is still not meeting demand. Researchers at Heriot Watt university estimated that there is a need for around 3,560 new Housing First tenancies every year to meet the demand

³¹ Ending Homelessness Together: Updated action plan, October 2020 Available from: <https://www.gov.scot/binaries/content/documents/govscot/publications/strategy-plan/2020/10/ending-homelessness-together-updated-action-plan-october-2020/documents/ending-homelessness-together-updated-action-plan-october-2020/ending-homelessness-together-updated-action-plan-october-2020/govscot%3Adocument/ending-homelessness-together-updated-action-plan-october-2020.pdf>

³² Homeless Network Scotland, Housing First Check-up. Available from: <https://homelessnetwork.scot/housing-first/checkup/>

³³ Housing First Scotland Annual Check-Up 2022. Available from: https://homelessnetwork.scot/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/Housing-First-Scotland-2022_web1-2.pdf

currently in the homelessness system and people who would be a good fit for Housing First in the next 10 years³³. The most recent Scottish Government report on Housing First shows that from April 2021 to September 2024 1,206 Housing First tenancies were started across Scotland . While this is certainly an achievement, it's simply not enough.

An oversight group, with representatives from Scottish Government, local authorities, health and social care, justice and Housing First providers could provide direction, guidance and pressure to scale up Housing First services to meet demand. A cross sector group would show that there was real commitment to scaling up Housing First and a recognition from across Government that Homelessness is Everybody's Business.

³⁴ Housing First: monitoring reports, 1 April 2024 to 30 September 2024. Available from: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/housing-first-monitoring-reports/pages/1-april-2024-to-30-september-2024/>





BECAUSE PEOPLE MATTER