

# HOUSING FIRST SCOTLAND



# SEMINAR REPORT

Held on 10 May 2017 | Stirling



EUROPE & SCOTLAND  
European Social Fund  
Investing in a Smart, Sustainable and Inclusive Future



# HELLO!

**Housing First Scotland** is a holding space for the growing momentum behind Housing First.

Somewhere to host a national discussion that prepares us and signposts us to the information and evidence we need. A space to create a national policy for Housing First along with a practical package to assist local partnerships to scale up.

And we want to do all of this alongside people whose insight into homelessness and rough sleeping comes from their direct experience of it.

Why? Because the evidence for Housing First is overwhelming - but in contrast, the scale of delivery across the country is currently not. Only by scaling up will we be able to test whether this single policy change, delivered through local homelessness partnerships, can achieve a significant breakthrough in reducing homelessness and rough sleeping.

Nearly 250 people participated in our first national discussion in Stirling on 10 May 2017. This report captures that discussion and points us in the right direction to take the next steps.

And if you prefer a summary version – here’s the day’s takeaway messages:

Housing First is **“a no brainer”** (courtesy of Professor Sarah Johnsen) - and that we should  
**“Just do it”** (thank you, John Cameron).

So let’s do it! Join the Housing First mailing list at [info@ghn.org.uk](mailto:info@ghn.org.uk), or find us on twitter at [@HFScotland](https://twitter.com/HFScotland).



# KEYNOTE SPEAKERS

Scotland's first national seminar about Housing First was held on 10th May in Stirling. Marion Gibbs from Scottish Government welcomed participants from all sectors and all parts of Scotland to tackle the question of how ready Scotland is to scale up Housing First for those facing the deepest challenges.

Housing First is an internationally recognised intervention that has been shown to end homelessness for 8 out of 10 people with high support needs, with the provision of sustainable housing solutions as the first rather than last step.

With the local picture varying across the country the seminar was designed to bring together people 'starting out' on the development of Housing First in their area with those that were ready to start 'scaling up'. This approach, with discussion and debate at roundtables, promotes the exchange of knowledge, ideas and unique insights to help us all move forward.

## Keynote Speakers

In the morning there were two keynote speakers who helped place the day's discussions in context:

**Rebekah Widdowfield (Depute Director, Better Homes Division, Scottish Government)** discussed Housing First for Scotland, restating the Minister's ongoing commitment to tackling homelessness and highlighting the innovation, creativity and sustained partnership approach required to tackle complex issues resistant to easy resolution.

### ***Housing First operates within this space.***

With the strongest housing rights in the world and the valuable work undertaken in the sphere of public health, Scotland is well placed to build on the successes of the last decade – most significantly the 2012 target, the development of Housing Options, and the ongoing reductions in homelessness and repeat homelessness – to continually improve our approach to the collaborative working across organisational, sectoral and geographical boundaries and to routinely and successfully deliver Housing First to homeless people with the most complex needs.

The Scottish Government was pleased to support the development of Housing First in Glasgow in 2011 and very much welcomes the collective efforts now underway to take it forward across Scotland.

**Professor Sarah Johnsen, Institute for Social Policy, Housing, Equalities Research (I-SPHERE), Heriot-Watt University** tackled the crucial questions of what Housing First is and why we should do it.

Professor Johnsen provided an overview of Housing First: an approach that challenges established practice in working with the most vulnerable people by moving away from a model of 'treatment first' requiring people with complex needs to show that they are 'ready' for a home. Instead, Housing First seeks to circumnavigate a complex system of accommodation and support services by directly offering a settled home and ongoing flexible support, recognising housing as a right and not the 'prize' at the end of a complex set of interventions.

### ***And why do it?***

There is now a substantial body of international evidence from across the USA, Canada, Australia and Europe (including the UK) that shows:

- *80-90% housing retention rates after 2 years (with some of the early projects showing similar retention rates after 5 years);*
- *Improving health outcomes;*
- *Decreasing involvement in criminal activity and anti-social behaviour;*
- *Improved cost-effectiveness of service delivery and cost savings.*

Professor Johnsen concluded that, while Housing First is not a panacea, the evidence base on its effectiveness is far stronger than for any other intervention and that it demonstrates exceptionally positive outcomes for a group that has historically been poorly served.

# ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSIONS: STARTING OUT

## (A) Does Fidelity Matter?

Patrick McKay, Operations Manager, Turning Point Scotland

Patrick McKay described Turning Point Scotland's experience in implementing the UK's first Housing First pilot in Glasgow in 2011 – which works with 42 people with the most complex needs and has seen almost universal tenancy sustainment - and its subsequent expansion into surrounding areas including Renfrewshire and East Dunbartonshire.

Patrick outlined the ongoing work of ensuring that the practical delivery of Housing First matches the principles of the approach as the closer the fidelity, the evidence says, the better the outcomes. In reality, this means:

- building strong partnerships with housing, health and (other) support providers;
- implementing a model of assertive outreach to engage with people where they are (e.g. begging sites, local pharmacies for methadone prescription, building up contact details for family and friends);
- requiring no level of housing readiness or commitment to abstaining from substance of choice;
- ensuring people have access to secure, dispersed housing across all parts of the city; *and*;
- developing a model of peer support workers to build authenticity.

What positive aspects does your local area already have in place to help those getting started with Housing First?



- Integration of Health and Social Care at a local level can help ensure easier provision of, and funding for, ongoing wraparound support;
- Local, motivated housing providers (both Local Authority and Housing Association) committed to achieving tenancy sustainment and tackling homelessness;
- Experienced, committed staff who embrace change to achieve better outcomes for vulnerable people;
- Improved data linkage at a local level (e.g. Fife, North Lanarkshire) providing evidence of costs to sectors such as health and criminal justice if we don't provide sustainable housing solutions for people with the most complex needs. This can play an important role in securing long term, sustainable, cross-sector funding;
- Recognition that options are very limited for people with complex needs and we can build on the local willingness to innovate and change;
- Increasing local willingness to share responsibility for finding sustainable solutions.

**“Experienced, committed staff who embrace change to achieve better outcomes for vulnerable people”**



## (B) Is this Housing First ...? A Checklist

Mark McPherson, Director for Strategy, Partnerships and Innovation, Homeless Link

Mark outlined the work undertaken by Homeless Link to coproduce a set of principles to fit the context of homelessness provision in England. The principles underpinning the original Pathways to Housing Model developed in the USA, and those further developed by FEANTSA (European Federation of National Organisations Working with the Homeless) provided the basis for the Housing First England principles.

Following a period of consultation to help foster collaboration and shared ownership, a number of principles for Housing First in England were agreed:

- People have a right to a home (*and should not be distorted by false concept of housing readiness*);
- Flexible support is provided for as long as is needed (*which for some people could be the rest of their lives*);
- Housing and support are separated (*creating a clear distinction between housing management and rent issues and support to tackle complex disadvantage*);
- Individuals have choice and control (*it's about the person feeling more comfortable, not service providers feeling more comfortable*);
- An active engagement approach is used (*there is no such thing as difficult to engage, it is the responsibility of the service*);
- The service is based on people's strengths, goals and aspirations (*rather than the person being the sum of their problems*);
- Harm reduction approach is used (*no requirement for people to abstain from drugs or alcohol, although support will be provided on the terms of the person*).

Are these the right principles for Scotland? Is anything missing?



- Strong support for the principle of housing as a right and not something that is earned (*but in Scotland would we want to go further and include the principle of secure, dispersed housing?*);
- Closer attention should be paid to the risk of social isolation or boredom, especially if someone secures housing in a new area (*bring forward a specific principle that promotes the role of positive social networks, community integration and something to do – work, volunteering, learning and leisure*);
- Recognition that it is crucial to embed the principle of choice (*acknowledging that this can in practice be difficult to negotiate*);
- Agreement with the principle of flexible, open ended support (*understanding that our current funding and commissioning arrangements make this difficult*);
- Strong support for the separation of the housing and support functions (*but on the clear understanding that this doesn't stop regular communication*);
- There should be a specific principle around embedding the peer support approach in Scotland.



## (c) Housing First for Families

Ruth Robin, Operations Manager, Shelter Scotland

Ruth provided an overview of work within Shelter Scotland to apply some core Housing First principles – non-conditional, wraparound support, harm reduction, stickability – to work with homeless families with a range of needs. Based on consultation with families the work undertaken is focused on the importance of:

- a permanent home – with choice for the family;
- self-directed and personalised support;
- shared ownership of support plans; and
- the empowerment of peer support.

At the heart of success is the partnership agreement involving everyone with a stake in achieving success with the family to ensure they can access a home that meets what they need and want. This works from the basis that staff are free to do whatever it takes to make the situation better rather than working to a prescribed list of tasks regardless of the circumstances.



In what ways do you think “Housing First for Families” needs to be distinct from an approach for single people?



- We need to recognise the many modern versions of family, what this means to different people, and respect that not all family units are related or legally bound;
- The importance of robust training for staff (often more used to working only with adults) to identify and respond to child protection issues;
- While partnership working is always important, stronger links with early years and education will be central;
- The challenge and opportunities that come from identifying the priorities of the whole family (rather than individuals within the family);
- Taking into account fears vulnerable families often have about engaging with statutory services in case it impacts on custody of children;
- Strong connections with the Getting it Right for Every Child (GIRFEC) agenda;
- Ensuring families can access the size of home they need.



# KEYNOTE SPEAKER

The afternoon session switched gears to move from how we begin to implement Housing First to how we scale up existing projects to make the approach more commonly available. What is currently stopping us from upscaling Housing First and what mechanisms can we put in place to support a safe and secure transition away from traditional 'treatment first' models?

**Tom Bennett, Investment Director at Big Society Capital** outlined the development of the Housing First Transition Fund to provide short term secured loans to homeless charities and housing associations currently delivering traditional accommodation models to replace congregate living with independent housing. The development of the Fund is based on the understanding that, while there is growing commitment to Housing First, pressures on public sector budgets and competition for charitable grant makers and trusts means that providing the funding required to support a successful and sustainable transition would be very difficult.

The Transition Fund will work by:

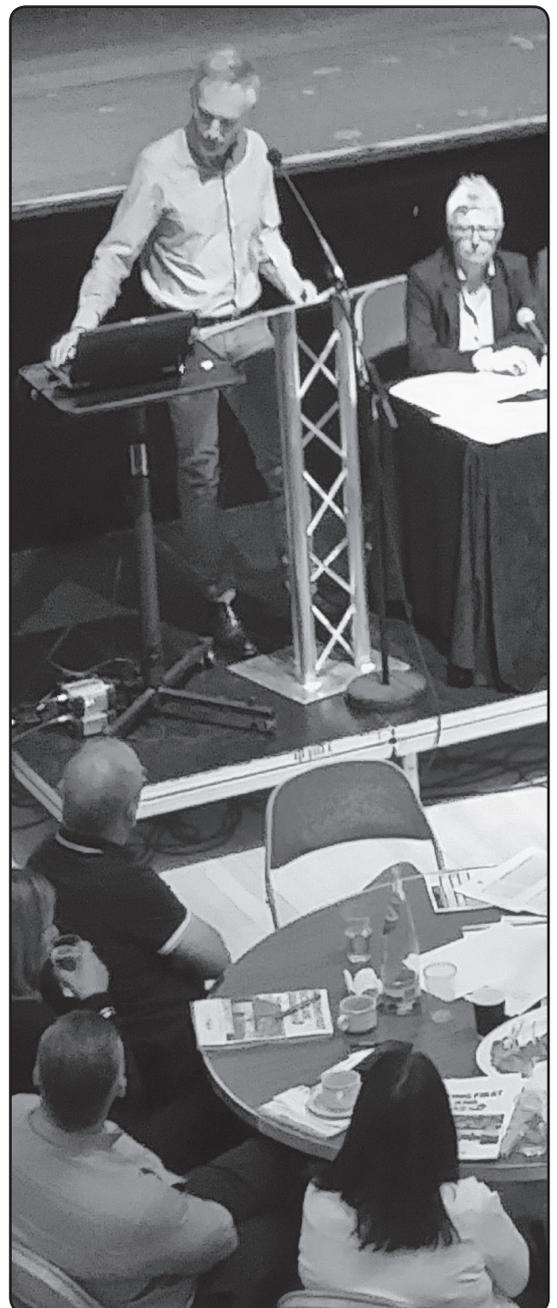
- Providing funding to acquire homes on the open market locally which will be owned by the housing association;
- Commissioning the charity to provide Housing First support to clients in mainstream tenancies with support provided in their own homes;
- Supporting systemic change by providing funding to cover increased interim operational costs for the support provider and the housing association during the transition period; and
- Closing the residential accommodation with the vacant site being sold, where appropriate, to repay the Fund (although it is recognised that it may be the case that the most valuable option might be to convert the existing project into mainstream tenancies, boosting local supply).

The fund is a not-for-profit lender run as a charity for charities with social investment from trusts, foundations, individuals and impact funds. Longer term sustainability can be achieved when the money is returned to the Fund to recycle for other charities transitioning to Housing First.

The Housing First Transition Fund has been developed as a solution to the existing funding challenges and aims to become operational in Glasgow in the second half of 2017.

**“We will find them ...  
we’ll go to their  
pharmacist ...  
we’ll just keep looking”**

*Tina Platt, Peer Support Worker,  
Turning Point Scotland*





# ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSIONS: SCALING UP

## (D) Liverpool City Region Approach Chris Hancock, Head of Housing, Crisis UK

Chris Hancock introduced the feasibility study being undertaken by Crisis and partners in the Liverpool City Region to upscale Housing First, with the aim of developing it as the default option for people sleeping rough and people with complex needs.

The intention is to create a sustainable model, not a short term pilot, which supports Liverpool City Region to create real systems change. Central to the feasibility study is:

- Understanding the current homelessness system in the region and considering future, optimal systems to sustainably tackle rough sleeping;
- Defining exactly what is meant by Housing First in the region and being clear about who it is for;
- Identifying the real barriers to progress – housing supply or housing access?
- What services need to be delivered ‘in house’ to be successful?
- Defining and implementing a transitional solution to commissioning that ensures a complementary, coordinated homelessness system;
- How to ensure political support and how to tackle important political questions and challenges (such as how to tackle the question of perceived queue jumping when housing is seen as a scarce resource)?

At the heart of the feasibility study has been a collaborative approach, learning from people with lived experience of homelessness and service providers and commissioners to help develop responses to the key challenges and find solutions that meet the local needs across the Liverpool City Region.

A Toolkit is also being produced to inform UK and European wide roll-out of Housing First.

**“Would it make sense to take a regional approach to Housing First transition in Scotland, along the boundaries of Housing Options Hubs?”**

**What elements of the Liverpool City Region approach to scaling up Housing First could we use here in Scotland?**



- Would it make sense to take a regional approach to Housing First transition in Scotland, along the boundaries of Housing Options Hubs?
- Important that people with lived experience of homelessness are part of discussions during Housing First transition;
- Key questions tackled in the feasibility study important to answer in Scotland, e.g. is the housing challenge about supply or access and how does this differ locally?
- Key questions around different responsibilities of local authorities and third sector also important in Scotland;
- The collaborative approach with stakeholders is positive and can be used to help develop partnerships in parts of Scotland not yet delivering Housing First;
- Use language of ‘triage’ to assess greatest need when it comes to housing allocation.



## (E) Housing First Northern Ireland

David Carroll, Director of Services and Development, De Paul Ireland

De Paul Ireland turned to the Housing First approach pragmatically after observing that people were regularly placed in hostel type accommodation but rarely moved on into mainstream housing and questioned whether this was a systemic housing issue or whether services had a lack of ambition for people in terms of the housing they could sustain?

David described the pilot starting in Belfast in January 2013 that was funded through reallocation of resources from other De Paul services. In Northern Ireland this has seen 110 people housed in Belfast with another 55 in Derry. The tenure of the housing provided is relatively evenly split, with 40% provided by Registered Social Landlords, 34% provided by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, and 26% by private landlords.

To date, a 79% tenancy sustainment rate has been achieved and an evidence base on cost effectiveness has been developed that shows that:

- The mean level of Supporting People grant per head is less than half for Housing First than for supported accommodation;
- Every £1 spent on Housing First generates a £15 social value across wider service provision such as A&E; and
- A strategic approach to securing housing is central and this requires understanding the scale of local need. Can it be written into housing development plans? And can Housing First be written into commissioning plans to ensure fidelity to the principles that ensure higher levels of success, including a clear definition of who Housing First is for?

### What areas of learning from Northern Ireland can we use to inform our approach to scaling up Housing First in Scotland?



- Can Housing First be written into national and local Housing Strategies, including a proportion of new build homes being made available?
- There is work currently being undertaken in Renfrewshire to better understand any cost savings achieved through Housing First;
- Have we fully considered how we can make better use of the Private Rented Sector as we upscale Housing First? It may help embed the principle of choice;
- Needs analysis at a local area to project demand – may be difficult as not all areas collect robust data on rough sleeping;
- Give further consideration to who Housing First is aimed at – will that be different locally? For example, could it be targeted at short term prisoners?
- Develop robust, meaningful evaluation to ensure we continue to learn;
- In what ways can we use Discretionary Housing Payments to support the transition to Housing First?





## (F) European End Street Homelessness Campaign

Linda Butcher, Coordinator, Building & Social Housing Foundation (BSHF)

Linda provided an overview of the European End Street Homelessness Campaign, a movement of cities (including Glasgow) working together to prevent people dying, or having their life chances diminished, on the streets. Member cities sign up to a number of campaign principles, with Housing First being at the core based on the significant evidence outlining its effectiveness in ending street homelessness.

Inspired by the success of the Y Foundation in Finland and the 100,000 Homes campaign in the USA, the European End Street Homelessness Campaign is built on the understanding that traditional approaches to tackling rough sleeping are not working (for example evidence in Valencia showed that more people were sleeping rough than accessing the emergency shelters) and that in many cities there is very little understanding of the scale and nature of rough sleeping and who is most affected by it.

The campaign supports member cities to better understand their local rough sleeping population and overcome the challenges to ending street homelessness which can include:

- Challenging local housing markets;
- ‘Competition’ between organisations and sectors;
- Fear of change;
- Forming sustainable partnerships;
- Practical implementation;
- Resources;
- Political will; and
- Approaches to commissioning.

### What do we need to do in Scotland to ensure that Housing First is directly available for people sleeping rough?



- Need to build on active outreach models going to rough sleepers where they are rather than being office based;
- Train former rough sleepers as peer support workers to increase information via word of mouth;
- Need to ensure that mainstream housing is accessible quickly to move someone off the streets and bypass complex system of service provision;
- Challenge low expectations so that people sleeping rough expect to be housed rather than accommodated. And keep on offering, even if someone is not engaging;
- Be flexible and do not require engagement with statutory services as a pre-requisite for Housing First;
- Build up knowledge base on rough sleeping populations in towns and cities across Scotland;
- Build up trust with people so they want to engage and don’t doubt the offer of housing and support (‘too good to be true?’);
- Make links with the range of charities operating in cities providing support to rough sleepers (e.g. soup kitchens, Street Pastors, night shelters).

**“The number of people experiencing homelessness has increased in all countries under review except for Finland”**



# PANEL SESSION

The day concluded with a question and answer session with the panel made up of:

**Margaret-Ann Brunjes,**

*Director, Glasgow Homelessness Network;*

**John Cameron,**

*Director, Forth Housing Association  
and Chair of Stirling Homelessness Partnership;*

**Ann Carruthers,**

*Housing Advice & Homeless Service Manager,  
Renfrewshire Council;*

**Professor Suzanne Fitzpatrick,**

*Director of I-SPHERE, Heriot-Watt University;*

**Dr Neil Hamlet,**

*Consultant in Public Health, NHS Fife;*

**Patrick McKay,**

*Operations Manager, Turning Point Scotland;*

**Tina Platt**

*Peer Support Worker, Turning Point Scotland.*

## NEXT STEPS

for Housing First Scotland, in partnership with a wide range of collaborators, are:

- We will clearly define the guiding principles for Housing First in Scotland and consult on practical resources to assist local authorities, housing associations, health and third sector partners to scale up;
- We will launch a demonstration project in 2017 to test the Housing First Transition Fund model in partnership with Big Society Capital, Social Investment Scotland and Heriot-Watt University;
- We will test the delivery of Housing First in the Private Rented Sector to understand whether outcomes achieved are comparable;
- We will facilitate a series of further national cross sector events in 2017-18 to share learning and help create change;
- We will formally launch the Housing First Transition Fund and seek to secure further resource and investment packages to assist local partnerships to upscale Housing First.

## KEY MESSAGES

- While the rate of homelessness has reduced nationally, largely through the Housing Options approach, homeless people with multiple and complex needs are now a proportionally larger group and our homelessness systems are not designed to meet their needs;
- That Housing First has the potential to fill this gap. We now have all of the evidence we need to demonstrate this and so our core focus needs to be on ACTION;
- That local authorities need to be brave, offer strategic leadership and implement Housing First locally. And that local partners need to encourage and get involved so that the best approach can be created in each area;
- That Scottish Government could assist local implementation by enabling:
  - \* A policy position on Housing First;
  - \* A national and systematic way of assessing numbers and level of need - those who may not be counted in official statistics;
  - \* Funding support;
  - \* Their help getting more social housing providers involved.
- That Housing First is both cheaper and more effective. But local commissioning strategies should stretch across sectors (including addictions, criminal justice, mental health) to ensure the wraparound support can be costed and delivered in full;
- Make strong links with public health agenda to help create change - knowing you have a home to be discharged to aids your recovery;
- We need to learn from other areas but develop a locally sensitive approach to ensure the optimal balance of service provision;
- We need to get better at articulating that Housing First benefits communities as much as individuals;
- We need to figure out how to build capacity to develop and deliver the important peer support component across Scotland.

**Brought to you by:**

**Glasgow Homelessness Network** is a membership organisation with a unique role to evidence and advance solutions to homelessness and connect the insights of people who both work and live with the issue. Our home is Glasgow, but with national and European programmes.

**Turning Point Scotland** provides person centred support to adults with a range of complex needs. We learn from services and seek to influence social policy. Turning Point Scotland piloted the UK's first Housing First programme and continues to provide Housing First projects in Scotland.

**SHIEN** is the **Scottish Homelessness Involvement and Empowerment Network**, funded by Scottish Government and delivered by GHN. SHIEN collaborates with a wide range of partners to promote ways in which people who experience poor housing and homelessness can fully participate in the decisions that affect them.

