

# HOUSING FIRST SCOTLAND

# Reconnect

## Updates

'Welcome Back' from our Chair, Sir Andrew Cubie

A conversation hosted by Homeless Network Scotland on recent experience

Conversation among key partners across the Pathfinder on Housing First in their areas since March's lockdown and plans for future

An outline of the Housing First National Framework

Next steps



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After the collective trials of 2020, the scheduled September Connect event was renamed as Reconnect. The Reconnect event was held online, giving people an opportunity to check in with colleagues and reflect on our experiences during the spring and summer this year. Much of the discussion included references to the Housing First Tracker for August 2020, [available here](#), with the figures since updated and subsequent trackers are [available here](#). Reconnect was chaired by Sir Andrew Cubie, Chair of the Housing First Advisory Group, and host of the regular Connect Events that take place in Dundee at the Discovery Centre.

[Read more >>](#)



## Welcome Back

*After what can only be described as a painful spring and summer the autumn and winter ahead of us will also be a challenge. While this was not meeting in the manner that we are accustomed to it was an opportunity to ‘reconnect’ with one another after a year that has tested us all.*

This is also an opportunity for me to thank all of you for your hard work during the past few months. The monthly tracker released just ahead of the event showed the second highest month ever for new tenancies, achieved during all types of pain and distractions – this is remarkable. I know many of you are talking to one another beyond this event, but those who took part had the opportunity to share our experiences, good and bad, as well as reaffirming mutual support for the work that we are doing.

In all manner of ways, we have been battered by this pandemic, personally and professionally. We will not get back to normal for some time but in the meantime, we have to do the best we can, not least making the most of the many virtual ways of connecting, which are becoming second nature.

The reconvening of HARSAG by the Scottish Government this summer led to 100-plus recommendations being accepted by the Government, informing its updated Ending Homelessness Together Action Plan. For that to happen in the space of a few months is quite extraordinary. For government to take on board what was presented in the report is an enormous credit to those who took part in the group, quickly revealing in detail the correct path out of the pandemic.

The next step is to agree and implement the National Housing First Framework, which again will move the process forward in Scotland and is now open for consultation up to 31 December. The fact that we have been able to move both HARSAG and the Housing First Framework forward during this very difficult period is, I believe, testament to the commitment and hard work of all of you and I thank everyone who had a part to play in what’s been achieved.

**Sir Andrew Cubie**  
Chair, Housing First Advisory Group

# Scotland's Housing First Pathfinder Programme — progress so far

*As we entered lockdown in March, Scotland's Housing First Pathfinder Programme was completing its first full year of delivery. And while we were moving into a period of limited housing lets and challenges in the delivery of support, it is worthwhile to reflect on the early progress achieved in delivering on our shared goals.*

## **GOAL 1**

**Increase the number of people moving into their own safe, secure home**

*By the end of March 2020, 252 people had moved into their own home, that figure is now more than 300. With the average number of monthly tenancies doubling by the final quarter of the year 2020/21. At that point, the time taken to house 50 people had reduced by 70% (down from 209 days to 62 days).*

## **GOAL 2**

**Reduce the time taken for people to move into their own homes**

*By the end of March 2020, the average time taken for people to move into their own homes reduced by 43% compared to the average length of time spent in temporary accommodation in the same areas in 2018/19.*

## **GOAL 3**

**Increase tenancy sustainment and reduce repeat homelessness**

*Tenancy sustainment continues to hover around 90%, With indications from previous Housing First programmes in Europe showing that 80% to 90% tenancy sustainment is judged successful. Repeat homelessness has been reduced by 78% compared to rates recorded by local authorities in the Pathfinder programme, and there have been no evictions.*



# Impact of the Coronavirus pandemic on Housing First delivery

## Presentation from Martin Gavin

*Head of External Relations at Homeless Network Scotland*

***During the lockdown period (end-March to June) people had to stay at home, including staff and tenants. This meant that face-to-face contact became mostly virtual and housing allocations stopped or reduced significantly, leading to a drop in the average number of new tenancies starting and people expecting to move into their own homes had to stay in temporary accommodation for an extended period. The Housing First Pathfinder also saw a higher number of tenancies ending than usual.***

*The Housing First Tracker for August showed an increase in tenancies and the second highest month for new tenancies on record.*

And as circumstances changed July and August saw the pace of the programme pick back up again with the highest number of new monthly tenancies since the beginning of the pandemic. Learning from the response to homelessness during the public health emergency contributed to national and local governments committing to ensure a positive move forward for everyone accommodated in hotels, which for many will be a Housing First tenancy. The First Minister spoke of significantly scaling up Housing First in the Programme for Government at the beginning of September, and discussions continue with government.

Some of the very personal stories of success that have been shared by Pathfinders in the past few months include a story about James in Dundee, who had been sleeping in the city centre. He had chosen to stay outside to avoid the hostel environment.

Staff continued to engage with him and on finding a flat that was available, moved James in. At the time of the Reconnect event it was just over a year since James took up his tenancy and he is building a new life for himself, feeling secure enough to throw away his sleeping bag.

The Housing First outcome monitoring and evaluation is not proceeding as quickly as planned, and this is something that should be addressed now that a degree of normality is returning. Submitting the evaluation forms is the responsibility of the consortium leads and outcome monitoring will form a critical part of the way we measure success, not only in the Pathfinder, but for Housing First in Scotland overall.

Questions were received from Grant Campbell, Director Edinburgh Skylight at Crisis, and Nicky Miller, Head of Homelessness at Turning Point Scotland.

### **Grant Campbell asked:**

*If people we are working with do not have the right tech how can we support people toward digital inclusion, and what is the best way to support a significant ramping up as indicated by the First Minister?*

### **Nicky Miller asked:**

*How do we open up the data on Housing First that we have collated over the term of the Glasgow Pilot? We would like to contact colleagues in other agencies to help make sense of the figures and data we have, what does the evidence tell us after 10 years about how to move forward? Also, what can we do to prevent drugs deaths, closer working with the Drugs Deaths Task Force?*

# Pathfinder City Updates

## Aberdeen/shire

Mike Burns

***Housing First partners in Aberdeen have been directly on the frontline throughout 2020. In February, 31 people in tenancies, averaging 41 days to make an offer and 65 days on average to move into new tenancies. Sustainment was at 90% with no evictions – then the pandemic hit. All aspects of the programme slowed to a halt and risk assessments and supply of PPE became a daily challenge.***

Furniture supplies closed, trades locked down and some staff were shielding others carrying bigger caseloads. It was daily risk assessments and a constant battle to provide appropriate and enough PPE for staff teams. People with multiple complex needs started to feel the impact of Covid on their mental health showing just how much they were struggling. We quickly got teams together, and we pulled the Board back together with virtual meetings.

A new manager, Catherine, is in place and now has 90 in the programme in Aberdeen. Sixty-five people are now in tenancies, average length of days for an offer is 44 and average days to move in is at 65 – and still zero evictions, the result of much hard work.

Sustainment is at 92%, the thanks for this go to the partners who have helped achieve this. Aberdeen City Council teams, and Aberdeenshire Council, housing providers, PRS providing properties, support providers and programme participants who have worked so hard to stay focused. And thanks to our Board and all those involved in the very constructive and focused partnership in Aberdeen/shire.



With support from Crisis, HF Aberdeen developed an app. The app was funded by Crisis and developed in partnership with Simon Community Scotland. A pilot project is now underway with a selection of Housing First tenants in the region.

## Stirling

Emma Thomson

***In the height of lockdown, Stirling introduced a staff redeployment programme to mitigate potential staffing issues. While frustrating to see everything come to a halt, a positive is that the time was used to build relationships with the Homelessness Prevention Coordinator in Stirling to ramp up the referral process and has resulted in 20 participants being identified, with staff reaching out and starting assessments while allocations were on hold.***

Some of the more complex tasks during lockdown that the team faced have resulted in great partnerships, for example working to ensure a safe return for someone coming out of prison strengthened relationships with criminal justice partners. Staff reported having to think outside the box in terms of safety, enabling that person to come home and to be able to access their tenancy to get them a phone and

all the bits that they needed and so there was some fantastic partnership working between the Housing First team and criminal justice colleagues to make sure the person could return home safely.

The reduction in face-to-face support has been one of the toughest challenges being reported, impacting on many tenants as well as support workers. Stirling did not completely stop the face-to-face contact with tenants. There have been issues with door control, being able to get access has been a struggle at times, but frontline staff have been warmly praised and congratulated on their work to maintain contact and provide support.

## Edinburgh

Amy Hutton & Jackie MacKinnon

***At the time of the event, Edinburgh had 139 clients receiving support with 149 care packages, with 62 in tenancies so an 89% sustainment. No evictions to date but unfortunately three tenants have died. In addition, two tenancies were abandoned and two planned moves to supported accommodation have taken place.***

During Lockdown, the seven partners remained in touch regularly. The consortium was lucky in that new staff members started just at the beginning of lockdown. We held off allocating them a full client list so that staff were available should anyone across the consortium need to isolate or not be able to work, but that was not necessary in the end.



Hotels were available for people who were rough sleeping or just for extra capacity. Several services were able to utilise the people staying at the hotels as a connection point and re-connect with people who had not been engaging. Staff were creative and resilient in changing how they were working, moving to mostly phone support but also some socially distanced visits and walks and we ramped up the availability of food parcels.

The importance of remaining indoors triggered staff to make small gas and electricity payments, ensuring people were not forced into other means of making money. While effective, this poses a challenge of transitioning back out of this support and into more normal practice. Since June, the team have been ramping up, recruiting new staff to increase capacity.

With July came lots of pressures but great partnerships with housing providers allowed flexibility to work with tenants to prevent evictions. There was an increase in incidents of anti-social behaviour and work was done with housing providers and neighbours to deal with any issues. Housing associations and all partners have been supportive.

Several challenges exist in Edinburgh, with the difference between those in tenancies and the number of people receiving support from the programme significant. That gap was growing at the time of the event, as Edinburgh continued to bring suitable people onto the Pathfinder – the team is working with partners to look at additional ways of dealing with this aspect of the programme.

Edinburgh has challenges in terms of terms of housing supply with an acute shortage of suitable Housing First properties available.

Housing allocations closed for a bit, those had started to open back up at the time of the event. The EdIndex allocation system is employed for the bidding process bidding only on gold and silver priority, which Housing First falls into. The team hoped more properties would have become available during this time. However, people were not moving out or moving around as much. Additional pressures on supply mean that many properties

have come up in areas where there is a high concentration of similar lets, which is not in line with the principles of Housing First.

Edinburgh had recently entered a Coproduction process with the local authority as it examines how it might want to procure the service from 2021. Edinburgh is in a good place in terms of the way both tenants and staff have dealt with the pandemic, the level of creativity they have employed, and challenges remain around moving people into tenancies along with overall supply of suitable homes.



## Glasgow

Liz Littler

***Total of 108 people in their own homes, with tenancies provided by the Wheatley Group, other RSL's and the PRS. In August, Glasgow consortium moved seven people into tenancies with no previous movement since March because of the pandemic.***

Many staff were shielding during the lockdown. Staff can attend the office a few days a week on a rota basis and the benefit of this is for staff wellbeing more than anything else. Support for colleagues has been difficult to do digitally but can still be carried out as part of remote working. Staff have done so well in coping with the digital transformation and getting used to the new way of working.

Partnership working has improved and been enhanced during lockdown. Wheatley Group are looking to offer 20 to 25 properties per month and those in support will be able to filter

through into tenancies, Glasgow are confident that allocations will increase significantly.

Most tenants have shown real resilience throughout the last six months which has been a point of positive learning for everyone. Partnership working has been amazing, regular updates and communication with all partners has been important for future planning and developing better systems, including a Red-Amber-Green system developed with Glasgow HSCP for all partners to assess risk.

Online reflective practice for staff started in September to encourage peer support and recruitment is underway for six peer support workers. Teams are free to have a discussion without management present and this has proved successful and popular.

Sometimes people's perception was vastly different to the way things were, that was a challenge when it was not as easy to make contact in person. However, the resilience of service users has been amazing – it was not clear at the start how people would cope but in general they have been amazing.

Digital inclusion is a huge issue for tenants, consortium provided low cost phones for tenants to ensure they could keep in touch and very few tenants have Wi-Fi at home. In some cases these cheap devices were often lost or exchanged.

This flagged the challenges of ensuring that the consortium support workers can get in touch with tenants – no solution has been found for this problem so far.

Restrictions meant not providing the support we are used to providing and want to provide, face-to-face. Since April support has been largely over the phone. Glasgow reported four deaths since March, which staff believed may have been connected to an irregular and unpredictable supply of drugs resulting in overdose, with an additional tenant dying of natural causes.

The consortium has also moved offices, providing more space and increased privacy, everyone is excited about this move and looking forward with positive outlook.

# Dundee

Bryan Smith

***Biggest challenge during COVID has been the ability to move people into tenancies. This has created a backlog of people ready for tenancies but stuck in temp. There are currently 44 people in 43 tenancies, working with one couple, and 22 people waiting to be allocated tenancies. There has been one abandonment, one planned move to supported accommodation, one person in prison, and sadly three tenants have died.***

The partnership working between statutory and third sector organisations has been excellent throughout the last six months, with statutory and third sector agencies ensuring that people are getting the support they need, including phones for just £12.

Some face-to-face support has taken place, socially distancing in gardens or through windows. This has been important for some tenants particularly as other services have not been accessible during the lockdown period. Developing peer support network at present to offer a different type of support.

Since March seven people have moved into tenancies in Dundee. There have been two management transfers to allow tenants to move into properties better suited to their needs.

Three staff members have been recruited and HF Dundee are recruiting peer mentor through the Dundee volunteer network to be able to offer a slightly different type of support. Thankfully there have been no cases of COVID among the HF tenants and only one staff member has had to self-isolate due to a case within their family.

Should the country face another pandemic the view from Dundee is that they are in a good place to meet that challenge. Discussions are ongoing with Dundee City Council about the RRTP to upscale Housing First in the city and the team is getting back on track with the 2021 targets.



# Housing First Scotland National Framework

*After a short break for lunch the session resumed, summarising the Housing First Scotland National Framework, At the time the event was held this had not been published. The Framework is now available in full and feedback is welcome up to the end of the year, with the consultation closing formally on 31 December 2020.*



[Housing First Scotland  
National Framework  
PDF](#)

[Online Survey >>](#)

## Summing Up

***The Reconnect event was attended by between 50 and 60 friends and colleagues from across Scotland, an attendance that is not out of step with the in-person events held previously at the Discovery Centre. Many people remarked in feedback from the day how much they enjoyed being able to connect with people again after many months of home working.***

Several themes emerged from the updates delivered by the Pathfinder areas during the day: many colleagues report that tenants are struggling with digital inclusion. While Pathfinder teams have been purchasing low cost mobile devices for tenants, these have often been lost or no longer owned by the tenant and this made it more difficult to get in touch. In addition, many tenants do not have proper Wi-Fi and tech installed in their home, so there are limited ways of contacting tenants for support workers, at a time when in person visits are often not possible.

Another consistent theme is the development of peer support within Pathfinder areas, both for staff themselves and four Housing First tenants. In Glasgow, online reflective practice for staff started in September to encourage peer support and recruitment is underway for six peer support workers. Teams are free to have a discussion without management present and this has proved successful and popular. In Dundee, the consortium is developing a peer support network at present to offer a different type of support to tenants.

- The next Pathfinder Connect event will take place in 2021.
- The annual Housing First Conference will take place in March 2021 and will be a virtual event, similar to the Homeless Network Scotland conference in October. Booking for the conference will open approximately six weeks before.