

# HOUSING FIRST SCOTLAND

Communications Strategy 2022 – 23

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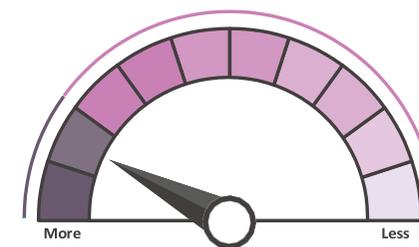


SECTION 1

WELCOME

## 1. Why we need to communicate – and how to do it

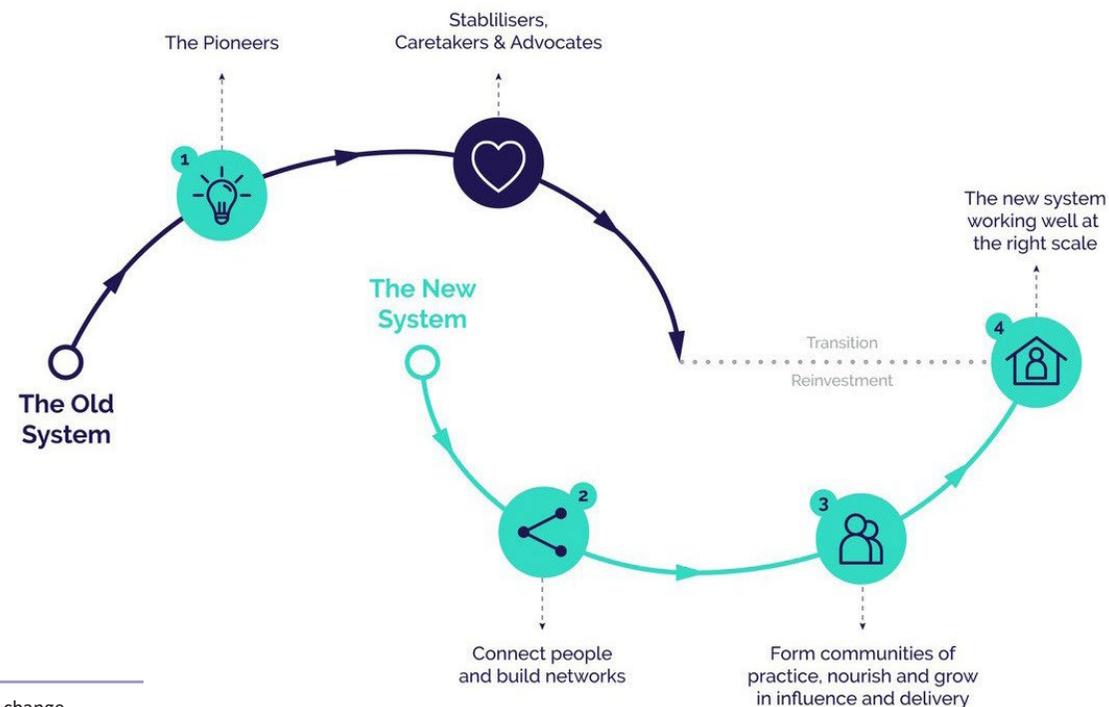
- 1.1 Housing First, as part of the overarching transition to a rapid rehousing approach, is one of the central ‘new directions’ Scotland has adopted to end homelessness. Housing First provides a settled home with flexible, responsive support and recognises this as the best base to build and live our lives. Housing redresses the disadvantage faced by people whose homelessness is compounded by other tough times, such as trauma, addictions, mental health or experience of the community justice system. It is estimated that Housing First could be the best fit for around 3,500 people in Scotland a year.
- 1.2 To secure the greatest benefit from marketing and communications activity, the transition to Housing First Scotland and the wider Rapid rehousing agenda must be understood and embraced by everyone involved in ending homelessness as well as people in communities across the country.
- 1.3 Housing First is now scaling up in the form of new partnerships between local authorities, housing and support providers. Communicating the social value helps all partners and audiences to share in the ambition, rationale and objectives and to build and maintain a high-quality Housing First approach locally.
- 1.4 For Housing First to succeed a growing momentum with strong communication and storytelling is needed, both within and beyond the ‘homelessness’ sector. Good communications is one of the central principles explaining how Scotland can scale up the policy to the level required to achieve real impact. Much of the potential of Housing First relies on widespread understanding among different stakeholder groups and support for the approach and the scale of change that is needed.
- 1.5 This updated communications strategy taking us beyond the Pathfinder will involve people, encourage collaboration and participation and keep that involvement active as Housing First is scaled up across most of Scotland’s councils in line with local need.



Housing Support

## 2. Changing a System – a safe transition

- 2.1 Scaling up Housing First as part of a new Rapid Rehousing approach is a significant change programme based on gold standard international evidence and experience and, once it has been achieved, will reduce the time people spend homeless and the damage it causes and be more effective and cost-effective for local authorities and partners. The pandemic has had an impact on business-as-usual. However, in some respects it has shown how effective and resilient the approach can be under stress, with good progress seen in 2020-2022 despite the challenges.
- 2.2 The Berkano<sup>2</sup> ‘two loops’ is a useful way to understand and communicate this change and each of our roles within it. For tackling homelessness in Scotland, the dominant system has peaked and become ineffective with homelessness no longer reducing and people spending long periods of time in temporary forms of accommodation, sometimes segregated from their community. In this unequal system, people face real disincentives to work or learn due to the housing benefit models within different types of homeless accommodation
- 2.3 The new system of earlier prevention, rapid rehousing and Housing First is established. Experienced ‘care-takers’ are in place to support services and approaches related to the old system – and most importantly, the people using them - until the services are no longer needed. The new system has leaders to drive change and ensure it is embedded and maintained – creating the new normal. The transition also has people to monitor and scrutinise it – to advocate for and defend the rights of people until it reaches the right scale and is working effectively. This is the role of the annual [Housing First Check Up](#) process overseen by Homeless Network Scotland working in partnership with the Scottish Government.







Transitioning to Rapid Rehousing & Housing First



SECTION 2

# COMMUNICATING HOUSING FIRST

### 3. Housing First – what’s the story?

- 3.1 Even the most compelling evidence alone is rarely meaningful enough to rally audiences around significant change. Housing First Scotland has a story (or many stories) sitting behind the data – to help end homelessness for those with the toughest experiences, which is a powerful call to action.
- 3.2 At the heart of this are people who have been disadvantaged by inequality, who have a range of the toughest experiences including childhood and early years trauma, domestic abuse, mental ill health, addictions as well as time spent in local authority care or prison.
- 3.3 Politicians and leaders across all the Holyrood parties with drive and passion willing to stake their reputation on a better way of doing things, as well as a Scottish Government committed to Housing First. There are inspiring fundraisers with long-term vision; housing providers who are thinking ‘yes’ instead of ‘no;’ frontline workers tired of a system that isn’t working and desperate to end homelessness for those they support; journalists and bloggers who can see past the ‘blankets-and-Bovril’ story and are willing to expose the real issues around homelessness – and the solutions.
- 3.4 The story starts with a Housing First pilot in Glasgow 2010. The story will end with:
  - scaling up across Scotland and the decline of homelessness and repeat homelessness for those with the toughest experiences.
  - the elimination of rough sleeping in Scotland.
  - a fairer, faster and compassionate response to homelessness embedded in local services across the country.

In addition, the seven principles of Housing First provide a framework and should be woven through whatever style of communications is being implemented. When conducting communications activity, internally or externally, strive to include these principles in news releases and briefings – these are the most important key messages sitting alongside an additional layer of narrative:

## 7 PRINCIPLES OF HOUSING FIRST

### 1 People Have a Right to a Home

People are offered a home of their own as quickly as possible, with no requirement to be 'housing ready.' Their tenancy agreement will be the same as any other tenant and they will not be asked to meet any additional rules or criteria.

### 2 Flexible Support is Provided for as Long as is Needed

Support offered is not time-bound and is flexible enough to collaborate with people at different levels of intensity based on their individual situations and experiences. This includes people choosing not to accept support or deciding they no longer need support as their situation has improved.

### 3 Housing and Support are Separated

Landlord and support functions are delivered separately, and choices people make do not affect their housing security. The offer of support stays with the person – if they decide to move to a new area or their tenancy fails, they are supported to avoid homelessness crisis again.

### 4 Individuals Have Choice and Control

People are involved in choosing their own home, in a location that best suits their circumstances. Through person-centred planning they are also in control of the support they receive choosing where, when and how support is provided.

### 5 An Active Engagement Approach is Used

Support staff have small caseloads, allowing them to be proactive and persistent in offering support; doing 'whatever it takes' as many times as necessary to build a positive relationship with people. Cases will remain open even when engagement is low.

### 6 The Service is Based on People's Strengths, Goals and Aspirations

Support is based on the understanding that there is always the possibility of positive change and improved health & wellbeing, relationships and social and economic integration. Support staff collaborate with people to identify strengths, goals and skills, building self-esteem and confidence.

### 7 A Harm Reduction Approach is Used

All engagement is based on the principle of reducing harm from alcohol and drugs and supporting people to minimise self-harm. Support is based on promoting recovery in physical and mental health and wellbeing.



## People have a right to a Home.

This narrative provides a framework and should inform even the most basic communications, connecting the simplest local media story or blog post to these messages.

## 4. Housing First – Key narrative messages

### Housing First is normal, it's fairer, it works, and everyone benefits.

**Why Housing First? We can condense this into one sentence containing four arguments. Housing First is normal, it's fairer, it works –and everyone benefits:**

- 4.1. 20 years ago, the key campaign message in the homelessness sector was that 'homelessness is not just a housing issue'. Today, the biggest supporters of Housing First still know that to be true, but also know that ending homelessness and exclusion needs to be housing-led.
- 4.2. We all have the potential to live a positive life in the way we want to, and home is the best base from which to build it. Housing First redresses disadvantage and should be the *first* response for people whose homelessness is made harder by experiences with trauma, addictions and mental health.
- 4.3. The best evidence from academic analysis estimates 3,560 Housing First tenancies per year, over a 10-year programme, would meet the demand of people already in the homelessness system, and those forecast.
- 4.4. **Housing First is normal:** Having a home is normal –everyone needs and has a right to one. But over time, we have responded to homelessness by building a different response, sometimes segregating people from their community - with B&Bs, shelters and hostels for example, and long periods in temporary accommodation. Then we normalised that – and started assessing whether people were 'ready' for a house at all. Housing First takes us right back to home and community, for those that need it most.
- 4.5. **Housing First is fairer:** If we understand homelessness as driven by poverty and inequality, then we know that some of us are much more likely to experience it. Not because of something we've done, but because the cards were stacked against us. Scotland's universal right to housing is internationally respected. But not everyone is able to enjoy those rights equally – know where to find them, or how to use them. Housing First helps to redress the balance and creates a more level ground so that everyone can get home.
- 4.6. **Housing First works:** There is now an overwhelming body of international evidence showing that, with close fidelity to the Housing First principles, most people are more likely to stay housed - and feel benefit in many other ways too. The approach delivers 80-90% housing retention rates after two years, improving health outcomes, decreasing involvement in community justice system along with improved cost-effectiveness of service delivery and cost savings.
- 4.7. **Housing First benefits all of us:** People who are homeless want settled, not temporary homes. Housing First provides the evidence of what works that academics want. The additional reassurance that housing providers want. The health outcomes that health professionals want. The outcomes and cost savings that local and national government want. It's the type of person-centred, open-ended support that great frontline workers are passionate about providing. And for cities, town centres and communities – Housing First offers a future perception of being happier, safer, more equal.

## 5. What will help – and hinder?

### Enabling

- The evidence base for Housing First is far stronger than for any other intervention for a group of people who have traditionally been poorly served by services. The [interim evaluation](#) is an indication of where we are and a guide to where we want to be.
- The old system is costly and ineffective and doesn't work for people.
- There is an appetite for positive and hopeful stories and information around homelessness – and a will for change.
- Widespread support – national and local government, health and social care, third sector, housing sector and lived experience advocates and volunteers.

### Hindering

- Some will be inclined to protect status quo, existing services and approaches in the current system.
- Local Housing First partnerships are just starting out. The depth and the scale of commitment by local and national government may not be apparent on the ground.
- There are sharp corners in the current system that rub up against the flexibility and agility needed to make Housing First work on the ground. Can be undermined from within.
- Many people working inside the system do not understand the way Housing First works or the fact that it's been successful in Scotland and what it required from them for it to scale up.

### To do

- There is political will, funding, sector support and an appetite among the public audiences to end homelessness. Focus on maintaining what exists and building additional momentum.
- Identify and build internal and external audiences, starting with those closest to the issue across local government, housing and health; start to sand down the edges of the system. Accessing internal communications channels within local authorities and support providers is critical.
- Create an environment for greater public audience awareness as Housing First extends out across Scotland in 2022 / 23 by more clearly defining how 'we all benefit'.

### To watch

- Change is difficult. The nature of the challenge is 'change communications,' a complex process at any time.
- Change is often resisted even when it's for the best. The pandemic has interfered with the internal communications essential for helping the process to bed in.
- Balance external communications with internal as Housing First becomes better understood by those working in health, housing, social care and other public sector roles essential to making it work.
- It is desirable to engage with a wider range of audience groups, the challenge remains reaching less receptive and less engaged audience groups and how to achieve that.





## 6. Audience groups and channels

Communication with internal and external audiences should be shaped keeping the following six tips in mind:

- **Focus** - make sure communications reflect as many as possible of the seven principles of Housing First to ensure consistency and focus
- **Respect** – for one another and those we work with
- **Discretion at all times** – a trusted partner and source of information
- **Solution led** – forward thinking and unafraid to question
- **Co-production** – always looking for collaboration and partnership at every turn
- **Person-Centred** – bringing human stories to the front, based on equality and fairness

Internal		External	
<b>Sector, partners / peers</b>	<b>Volunteers / lived experience and tenants</b>	<b>Media and Public Relations</b>	<b>Political: Public Affairs, MPs and MSPs, parties</b>
Partner newsletters / magazines Scottish Government blogs and news channels / website	All in for Change and other lived and frontline experience groups	Specialist and trade media: Housing, Health, Public Finance – shape the narrative to fit the channel	Briefings for MSPs – self-produced and partners. Holyrood magazine public events and comment / editorial
In-sector conferences and awards or other events	Social media: bloggers influencers / shift conversation from concept to action	Scotland local media websites / newspapers	Academics and thought leaders in housing and homelessness. <b>Create Housing First Ambassadors</b>
The check-up process working with 13 councils across Scotland.	Event for local charities and community groups in Check Up areas on Housing First to engage and inform	Cynics and sceptics in professional roles: health, housing and social care	Cross party committees: Housing, Health Inequalities, Mental Health. Questions in Parliament.
Housing First Europe website and publications	Homeless Network Scotland website and mailing list resource	National broadcast and print/online media	Charities and pressure groups / activists lobbying activity
Housing First Scotland website and social media channel, plus partner websites and social media.			



