



HOUSING **FIRST** SCOTLAND

Annual Check-Up 2022

Doing Housing First and providing furnished tenancies for people has changed our thinking about how we support anyone after a period of homelessness. We're changing our void processes and saving good quality carpets and blinds; it's made us think why don't we do this for everyone moving into a new property?

[Local Authority]

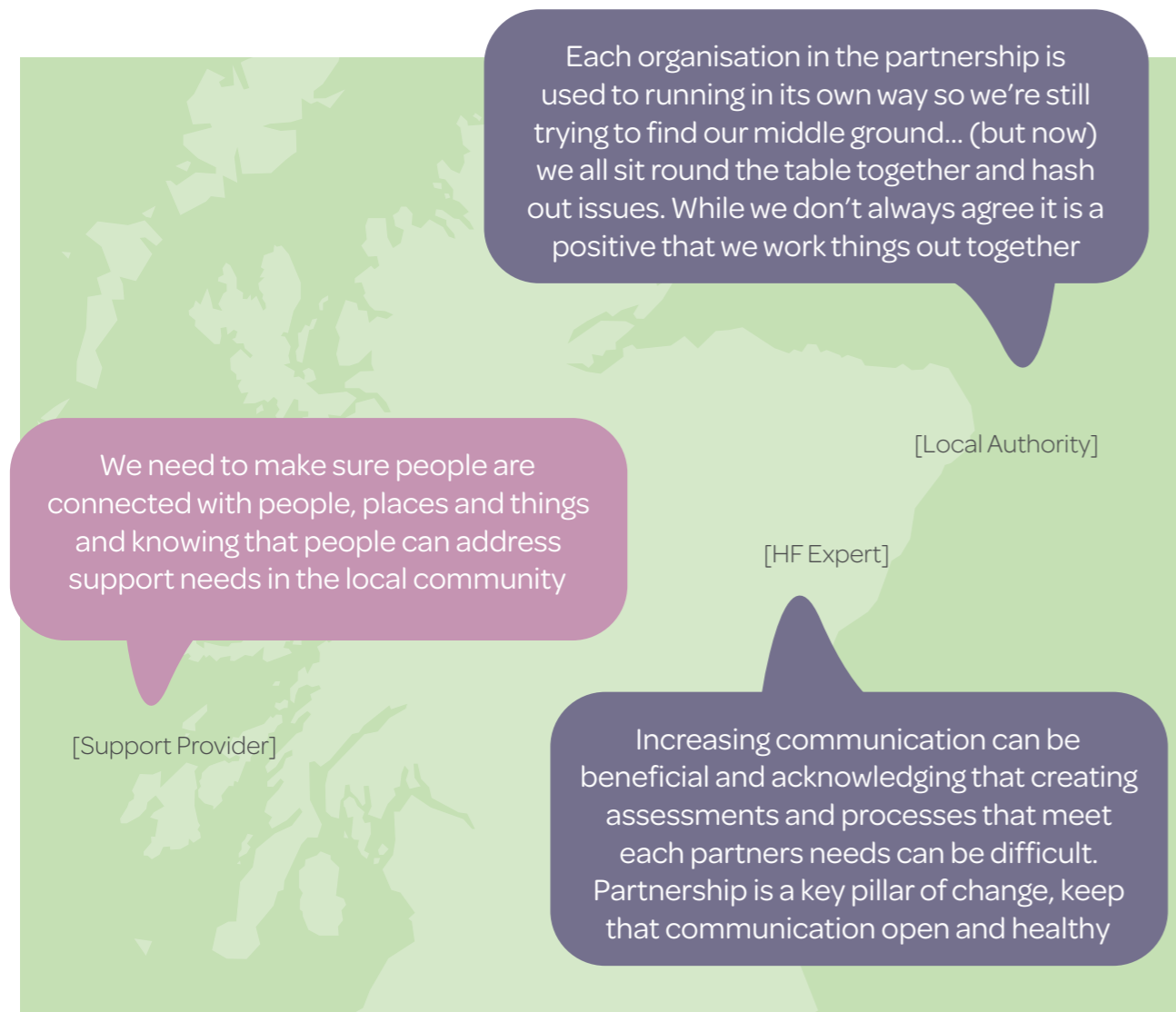
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About Housing First in Scotland

Housing First has been in operation in Scotland for over 10 years, starting in **Glasgow**, soon followed by **Renfrewshire, North Ayrshire, East Dunbartonshire, Aberdeenshire, and West Lothian**. These early adopters were inspiring and successful but remained small in scale with less than 100 tenancies started across this decade overall. In 2019, 6 local authority areas committed to scaling Housing First with partners and to provide a litmus test for how that could be done in other areas. From **Scotland's Housing First Pathfinder in Glasgow, Edinburgh, Dundee, Stirling, Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire** during 2019-22, Housing First is now being provided across 25 local authority areas with an estimated 1,333 tenancies started by the end of June 2022.

Housing First should be the first response for people whose homelessness is made harder by experiences with trauma, addictions and mental health. Housing First provides ordinary housing in an ordinary community because this, for most of us, is the best base to build and live our lives the way we want to. Housing First combines settled housing with person-centred, strengths-based and flexible support – as much and for as long as someone wants it. Housing First actively rejects the idea that many people are not 'ready' for housing and aims to prevent rough sleeping and divert people away from temporary homeless accommodation.



Housing First is underpinned by a set of seven principles:

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 criteria.

2. Flexible support is provided for as long as is needed

Support offered is not time-bound and is flexible enough to work 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 changed.

3. Housing and support are separate

Landlord and support functions are delivered separately, and choices people make about support 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 by finding and maintaining a new home.

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 and wellbeing, relationships and social and economic integration. Support staff work alongside 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.

What is the Annual Check-Up?

Homeless Network Scotland and Scottish Government consulted widely on a process to support local authorities to deliver Housing First in line with the National Framework, to reflect on how well Housing First was working in their area and identify any changes needed. This is called Housing First Check-Up. In this first year, 13 local authorities participated in the check-up process based on having at least one year of delivery, and not being a Housing First Pathfinder area (see page 10).

The annual Check-Up explores a broad range of perspectives on:

- Quality of Housing First support services.
- Fidelity to the principles underpinning Housing First.
- Improvement around local systems.
- Clarity on when to step-down and stand-down Housing First support.

There is no set path on how to do this best. Countries that are scaling up Housing First have adopted different approaches, including structured accreditation processes.

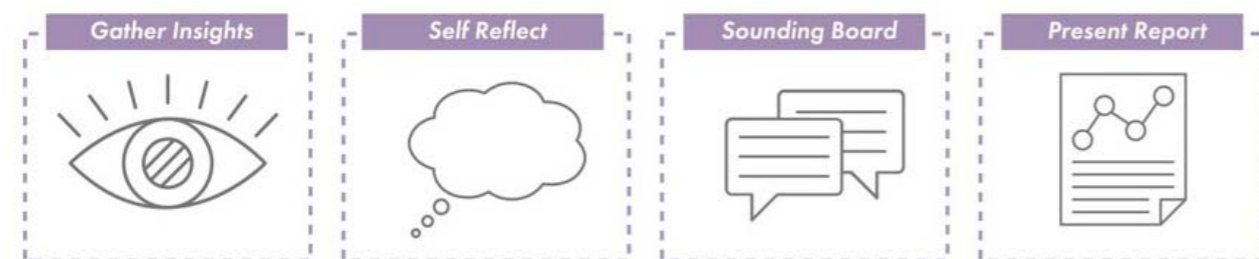
In Scotland, we developed a collaborative and self-reflective approach with the aim of creating a culture that recognises that Housing First planning and delivery is challenging but the outcomes rewarding. This approach recognises that local authorities and partners are naturally reflective, already committed to best-for-person and best placed to understand their own circumstances. Consistent, supported self-reflection that supports those who commission, manage, deliver and use Housing First services can serve to enhance that and share learning across different areas.





This process does not determine what is or isn't 'acceptable' Housing First, recognising that contexts and practicalities create a broad spectrum of what is feasible and desirable in each local area.

The Method

Annual check-ups were coproduced over a series of workshop sessions, planned and agreed ahead. UK and international Housing First experts supported this process by attending Sounding Board meetings and provided a huge added value to the process. Their perspective encouraged participants to reflect on why they deliver Housing First in the way they do, and to learn from examples of great practice from other countries. The panel included a mix of academics, policy experts and those with practical experience of delivering, and improving, Housing First programmes.

The stages each year are:



Stage 1	Gather Insights	Level	Regional Hub
	Evidence and insights are facilitated or reviewed by Homeless Network Scotland via: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Housing First Connect, an open event inviting feedback and ideas • Quarterly data returns on Housing First from local authorities to Scottish Government 		
Stage 2	Self-Reflect	Level	Local Authority
	Local authorities and partners self-reflect on progress towards meeting Housing First principles: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Small, selected groups of people from a range of roles (commissioners, managers, support workers, housing officers) complete a questionnaire providing their reflections on strengths, successes and areas of challenge. • Using red-amber-green matrix, the questionnaire asks people to reflect on core indicators for each of the 7 Housing First principles. This is condensed into 4 broad aims. • Homeless Network Scotland collates the range of returns from each local authority area, combining those perspectives into a 'Messages that Matter' report. This report highlights areas of consensus, areas where there is a difference of opinion, and areas to prioritise. 		
Stage 3	Sounding Board	Level	Local Authority
	Homeless Network Scotland invites the local authority lead for Housing First and a small group of their nominated partners to join a Sounding Board session in a group coaching format. This is to feedback and explore the messages that matter and to challenge each other's thinking with deliberate provocations to test assumptions and ways of doing things. The Board also offers an opportunity for local authorities to benefit from the experience and expertise of Housing First experts from across the UK and internationally. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A panel of at least 3 members convene to review the evidence from stage 1 and stage 2. • The panel explore the key considerations from the Messages that Matter report. 		
Stage 4	Present Report	Level	Local Authority
	Homeless Network Scotland provide final 'shared solutions' report for the local authority and partners, collating and presenting the evidence and information from stages 1-3: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local authorities can use this report to deliver an annual statement in Rapid Rehousing returns to Scottish Government on how to scale up Housing First and move closer to fidelity to Housing First principles. • Local partners can access packages of support in line with their priority areas, linking through the Housing First Connect sessions (from Homeless Network Scotland) and/or the Housing First Academy (from Turning Point Scotland). • Homeless Network Scotland incorporates learning into Branching Out: The National Framework for Housing First during regular updates and benchmarks great practice identified at local level. • At 6-months, Homeless Network Scotland will connect with the named person from the local authority to check-in and provide any support in line with the shared solutions report. 		

By following this process, we have engaged with a range of people across 13 local authorities working in Housing First through:

- 5 Housing First Connect sessions, by Housing Options Hub, to gather insights
- 46 self-reflection tools
- 12 sounding board meetings
- 12 local authority check-up reports

Key Takeaways

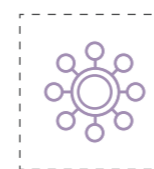
The Check-Up is designed to facilitate reflection on Housing First against the 7 Housing First principles, measuring how near each area is to meeting the principles and in line with the [National Framework, Branching Out](#). International evidence is clear that the higher the fidelity to these principles, the higher the level of success in terms of tenancy sustainment and wider outcomes.

Every local partnership that participated in the check-up process demonstrated a commitment to and enthusiasm for Housing First. They have shown that Housing First is a powerful local intervention for people whose homelessness has been made harder by experiences with trauma, mental health, addictions or with the justice system. Through problem solving, nurturing partnerships, and focusing on end-to-end processes – Housing First is working in all 13 areas.

Housing First Check-Up also uncovered many areas of inspiring practice as well as areas that need a local, and in some cases national, focus for the future. We set out key learning in 5 categories:



- Branching Out
- Securing Housing
- No Wrong Door
- Commissioning Support
- Making a Home



(i) Branching Out

The in-depth analysis carried out as part of the Hard Edges Scotland research published in 2019 provides strong pointers on the scale of Housing First needed in Scotland.

Bespoke analysis undertaken by Heriot-Watt university for Housing First Scotland estimates that around 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 to be best-fit for Housing First over the next 10-years.

This data analysis is a robust and important marker on scale. However, local areas still need to set ambitious markers on pace – considering the local factors that will influence how fast Housing First can scale up across the local authority area. This will include considerations and improvements in relation to housing supply and access, capacity of support providers to scale up, and the efficiency of local systems and processes that underpin Housing First.

The data analysis shows that, while highest levels of severe and multiple disadvantage are found in urban areas experiencing poverty and deprivation, a national approach to Housing First delivery tailored to local and rural needs across all local authorities is needed:

Housing First Demand Estimates

Aberdeen City	221	Edinburgh	357	Orkney	6
Aberdeenshire	103	Eilean Siar	8	Perth & Kinross	73
Angus	60	Falkirk	103	Renfrewshire	124
Argyll & Bute	40	Fife	273	Scottish Borders	55
Clackmannanshire	49	Glasgow City	538	Shetland	7
Dumfries & Galloway	109	Highland	91	South Ayrshire	58
Dundee City	181	Inverclyde	44	South Lanarkshire	158
East Ayrshire	79	Midlothian	33	Stirling	62
East Dunbartonshire	20	Moray	39	West Dunbartonshire	136
East Lothian	47	North Ayrshire	132	West Lothian	150
East Renfrewshire	17	North Lanarkshire	185	Scotland	3,560

Table 2: Housing First Demand Estimates 2021-2031 (per year)

Data collected by Scottish Government shows that 1,333 Housing First tenancies had started across Scotland at June 2022. 25 local authorities are using a Housing First approach at September 2022, with a further 2 local authorities in development and due to start during 2022-23.

The total number of Housing First tenancies created from April 2021 to September 2022 across these local authorities is 516. All tenants moved into permanent, settled homes.

Prior to Scottish Government quarterly monitoring, data on Housing First tenancies created through the Pathfinder was collected and published by Homeless Network Scotland and [can be found here](#).

The number of Housing First tenancies started by local authorities participating in this check-up process as of September 2022 are:

Local authority	Number of tenancies started
Renfrewshire	52
West Dunbartonshire	38
Midlothian	33
North Ayrshire	34
Falkirk	18
Fife	20
South Lanarkshire	16
Angus	8
South Ayrshire	9
Western Isles	6
West Lothian	7
East Lothian	<5
Highland	<5

Recommended

There are many more people that can benefit from a Housing First approach in each part of Scotland. Local authorities and partners need supported and encouraged to keep branching out further and more rapidly.

Due to how our team is set up, staff have a view of void properties and know when properties will become available. Having a shared understanding of what's available can really make a difference

[Local Authority]



(ii) Securing Housing

Gold star on providing a grace period for people moving into tenancies. This transition point is critical for tenants and people can have quite a difficult time moving from accommodation to their own tenancy and being forced to live somewhere unfurnished can compromise their feelings about being there

[HF Expert]

Delivering Housing First at pace is reliant on available housing stock, with strong allocations policies and a diverse pool of housing providers to make properties available to prospective Housing First tenants. One area (Midlothian) has changed how properties are allocated to Housing First; each month two properties are allocated to the Housing First service and prospective tenants have a choice of all available, suitable properties, as well as the those allocated directly to Housing First. This has worked well in this area, with this local authority being the closest to creating the Heriot-Watt estimated number of HF tenancies required each year per area.

Where Housing First teams are located within a local authority can impact on how different aspects of the service operate. In one area (Fife) the process for Housing First sits within the housing team (rather than housing support, or within the health and social care partnership) and this area has evidenced much shorter waiting times for tenants to move into their property - averaging at 90 days compared to the national average of 201 days to move into a property. This local authority attributes their short waiting times to staff having strong local knowledge of housing stock and void properties, and a commitment across the team to prioritise housing first tenants.

The lack of housing availability and low turnover of housing stock does not compromise the principle of choice and control as much as it compromises the relationship between tenant and support provider. To ensure relationships aren't affected by slow progress Housing First workers should have honest conversations with tenants in early stages of the process and use community mapping, consult with housing officers and combine intelligence to share with the tenant to aid in their decision on where they want to live.

Recommended

Local authorities struggling to source properties due to increasing market pressures consider adapting allocation policies to allow direct allocations to Housing First, with the understanding that this must be done in a way that does not affect the choice and control of the tenant.



(iii) No Wrong Door

Local areas where the Housing First partnership includes a range of multidisciplinary partners do not experience the same difficulties accessing specialist services. Some local authorities have set up partnerships with alcohol and drugs services, others with health including mental health, and others with the police. These partnerships are felt to be effective due to co-location of staff; expertise from outside housing and homelessness being part of the full process from decision making on referrals to providing support.

The long-term approach to resourcing Housing First is to build it into a range of frameworks, to join up approaches and avoid long-term duplication of services. A shared funding approach, especially with health and social care partnerships and community justice, acknowledges the shared cost benefits of Housing First. Housing First can make a clear contribution to a range of strategies that underpin the wider Public Health and Health & Social Care sector, including Scotland’s National Performance Framework, Local Outcome Improvement Plans, The National Health and Wellbeing Outcomes Framework, The Fairer Scotland Action Plan and many more. A full analysis of Scotland’s policy environment in relation to Housing First can be found on page 18 of the Branching Out framework.

Local partners reflected on how to enable better engagement with specialist services when people need them. Housing First support is sometimes perceived as a catch-all service and in some cases this perception from other sectors has hindered engagement with specialist services. In most areas people said that specialist services, particularly mental health services, are challenging to engage with, which they put down to lack of funding and long waiting times. Some of our experts recommended buying in mental health services for Housing First tenants or bringing dual-diagnosis experts into the Housing First partnership. These solutions are helpful in the immediate term; however long-term solutions for tenants are being sought by local partnerships

Recommended

The development of local methods to enable Housing First tenants to be ‘passported’ into specialist services when they are needed. This would allow tenants to circumvent long waiting lists and enable Housing First support to focus on the goals and aspirations of tenants, while specialist services engage with tenants to provide support in their area of expertise.

The different perspectives of each partner involved doesn’t surprise me, strong partnerships often experience differences of opinion and competing priorities

[HF Expert]



(iv) Commissioning Support

A robust and inclusive commissioning approach can ensure that the delivery of Housing First is commissioned against, and therefore tied to, the principles of Housing First. Consultation during 20223 will help develop a commissioning and cost model for Housing First in Scotland that protects low caseloads and the capacity of support workers.

Some areas were found to be operating with a staff to tenant ratio higher than the recommended 1:7 in line with the Housing First principles and it is imperative that the drive to deliver Housing First at scale does not compromise this basic principle. Great Housing First support workers need time to build trust, relationships and to support people to build a life as part of a community. An ethical local commissioning approach will help to bring caseloads down to the recommended maximum.

We find the support provider to be a breath of fresh air, they are highly motivated to deliver quality support especially during covid-19 restrictions. Working in Housing First support can be challenging for staff when they take a ‘whatever it takes’ approach

[Local Authority]

Housing First tenants can decide they no longer want or need intensive support, or that they no longer want to be supported by Housing First at all. These phases are known as step down (tapering or pausing support) and stand down (stopping support). The process of reducing or stopping support is not a requirement for Housing First tenants or providers of support, it is an option to be used in line with the wants and needs of tenants.

There is a movement around peer mentors in Housing First services among tenants who are more settled and the skills they could offer to the Housing First service or to connect with new tenants. A peer mentor can often connect more easily, enhance engagement, or help to stay connected with tenants.

Recommended

Guidance on commissioning Housing First and on step down/stand down support should be built into the National Framework to help ensure a consistent approach across local authorities.

Fully consider the pros and cons of delivering Housing First support in-house vs. commissioning the service to a third-party provider. Independence of housing support from housing provision is key, and Housing First tenants need to feel confident with the arrangement.



(v) Making a Home

It has become practice in Scotland for Housing First tenancies to be furnished in advance of, or as soon as possible after the tenant receives their keys with the most common mechanism for funding this being the Scottish Welfare Fund (SWF) through Community Care Grants and using furniture initiatives offering second-hand furniture at a low cost. How this is delivered varies by local authority, and based heavily on personal relationships between Housing First and SWF staff. Partners reported a decrease in available furniture initiatives in their area, meaning that tenants are getting less for their money and increasing reliance on Community Care Grants to provide large furniture items. We will work toward the development of a minimum standard of furnishing for Housing First tenancies to accompany a change in SWF guidance.

Belgium and the Netherlands provide great examples of sharing responsibility among partners to furnish tenancies, where they create a moving in checklist with the tenant and the process is fun, the moving in day becomes an event for the tenant and the team.

Recommended

A change to SWF guidance to allow faster provision of funds, white goods or furniture for Housing First tenants. This will allow all local authorities to offer a uniform service to Housing First tenants and would minimise the need for local authorities/housing providers to absorb the cost of grace periods for rent while tenants wait for properties to be furnished.

Increasing communication can be beneficial and acknowledging that creating assessments and processes that meet each partner's needs can be difficult. Partnership is a key pillar of change, keep that communication open and healthy

[Local Authority]

[Local Authority]

We try to make sure that it's as easy to run as possible because Fife is so widespread with 7 local areas. We made sure that housing is as on board with supporting people as the Rock Trust.

Acknowledgements

With thanks to...

Our expert panel

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Scottish Government

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Housing First Connect, Know How, Check Up and Academy.

This is Housing First Scotland – please get in touch with any questions or comments:



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Housing First is normal, it's fairer, it works – and we all benefit.

Housing First Scotland

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