

HOUSING FIRST SCOTLAND

Annual Check-up 2024-2025



October 2025

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



Executive Summary

“They’ve helped me build relationships with my family again and I am in a better place than I have ever been.”

Housing First should be the first response for people whose homelessness is made harder by experiences including trauma, addictions and mental health. It prioritises a home first of all and without any preconditions. It offers long-term, flexible support with the tenant’s choices at the centre of decision-making.

Housing First is now delivered in most parts of Scotland and there is overwhelming evidence that it works. The number of Housing First tenancies continues to increase. It is estimated that a total of 1,320 Housing First tenancies have started across Scotland between 1 April 2021 and 31 March 2025 and of these 1,032 remain active¹.

Every year, Homeless Network Scotland facilitates a process of self-reflection and learning for all those involved in Housing First. The Check-up process includes self-reflection surveys by local authority leads and delivery providers, tenant surveys, sounding board meetings involving international Housing First experts and Connect events to share learning.

High impact Housing First

The Check-up process has surfaced many examples of local practice that goes above and beyond, alongside important stories of lives transformed and new roots taking hold. People staying in their homes and avoiding repeat homelessness, sometimes for the first time. People getting jobs, improving their health and wellbeing, keeping their family together and much more.

It is testament to the extraordinary support provided by Housing First workers that so many tenants are so easily able to describe the life-changing impact of Housing First and the pivotal role of their Housing First worker in achieving that. These outcomes include 83% tenancy sustainment when Housing First is delivered in line with the internationally designed and tested framework.

But progress is fragile. Housing First needs full and unconditional support from local authorities, health and social care partnerships and other key partners to ensure that the integrity of the model is protected and people prioritised who could most benefit from Housing First.

Priorities to expand the impact of Housing First

Housing First is a critically important public service for people experiencing severe and multiple disadvantages. However, there has been little improvement this year in scaling up Housing First and continuing frustration at short-term and uncertain funding.

While Housing First has shown significant promise in addressing homelessness, its implementation is still developing and requires strategic collaboration at both local and national levels to unlock its full potential.

The key priorities for action to protect and expand the reach and impact of Housing First in Scotland are:

- Renewed political commitment to Housing First.
- Robust policy support and dedicated, multi-year resources for its nationwide expansion.
- The urgent integration of health and social care as joint planners and commissioners of Housing First.
- Joined up planning strategies at local and national level with alcohol and drug partnerships, health services and community justice services.
- A consistent and earmarked supply of social housing for Housing First.
- More support capacity to enable its potential to prevent homelessness and reduce repeat homelessness to be realised.
- More opportunities that bring together people who champion or want to learn about Housing First.

Housing First: now more than ever

Scotland’s housing emergency threatens to deepen exclusion, leaving more people trapped in rough sleeping or in unsuitable and unsafe temporary accommodation; environments that erode opportunities and entrench disadvantage among lives already marked by extraordinary challenges.

Housing First is the proven solution, profoundly transforming the lives of those facing the most severe and multiple disadvantages. By placing a stable home at the heart, with dedicated and expert support, Housing First provides the foundation for people to rebuild their lives on their own terms.

To redress entrenched inequality in Scotland, we must prioritise Housing First and the people it serves. This needs more urgent joint planning and joint investment across the range of sectors that we know support the same people – ensuring homes are the cornerstone of support.

1. The Scottish Government. *Housing First: monitoring reports: 1 October 2024 to 31 March 2025*
<https://www.gov.scot/publications/housing-first-monitoring-reports/pages/1-october-2024-to-31-march-2025>



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1. Introduction

1.1 About this report

Housing First is not just a homelessness response; it is one of the most important interventions that Scotland can make for people at the ‘hard edges’ facing severe and multiple disadvantages.

Scaling up Housing First in line with local need has been a Scottish Government policy objective since 2018 and an important part of local plans to resolve homelessness and redress inequality.

This report updates on the progress made to scale up Housing First by local authorities and their partners during 2024-25, outlining common themes and priorities from the perspective of those who are planning, commissioning and delivering Housing First on the ground.

1.2 About Housing First

Housing First is a successful approach to addressing homelessness that prioritises settled, mainstream housing without preconditions to meet. It emphasises housing as the strong foundation from which to build and live our lives, alongside wraparound support tailored to people’s needs and goals.

Housing First should be the first response for people whose homelessness is made harder by experiences including trauma, addictions and mental health. Around 10-15% of those who experience homelessness in Scotland each year are forecast to be a good fit for Housing First.

Housing First challenges the notion that many people are not ‘ready’ for housing, aiming to prevent rough sleeping and steer people away from unsuitable temporary accommodation. It is underpinned by seven principles:



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.

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.

2

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 ends, their support will continue.

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.

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.

5

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.

2. The Annual Check-up

2.1 Approach

The Housing First Scotland Annual Check-up is a method of professional reflection developed by Homeless Network Scotland and Scottish Government's Homelessness Unit in consultation with local authorities and support providers.

It is intended to help align Housing First delivery with the National Framework, to facilitate reflection on the impact of Housing First in each area and to share learning across areas to support Housing First to scale up in line with local need.

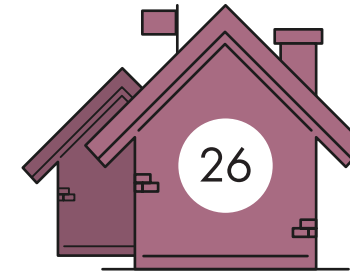
2.2 Stages

Housing First Check-up is a robust qualitative approach that draws from a wide range lens – workers who provide support, those who commission and plan services, and those who take up a Housing First tenancy.

The stages of the Check-up process during 2024-25 were as follows:

- **Stage 1: Self-Reflection.** Local authorities and partners reflected on progress through a survey, which used a red-amber-green matrix to review progress on core indicators relating to the Housing First principles. An online survey was also circulated to tenants to gather their insights and perspectives. HNS combined the surveys to report back to partners, highlighting patterns and also differences in scoring between different stakeholders, including local authority staff (such as commissioners, managers, support workers, and housing officers), as well as housing and support personnel.
- **Stage 2: Sounding Board.** Homeless Network Scotland invited the local authority lead and other key local partners to participate in a 'Sounding Board' session, which is a structured discussion based on the self-reflection forms and tenant surveys that were received. The session aimed to provide feedback, explore significant messages identified, and challenge each other's perspectives to test assumptions and approaches. An expert in Housing First joined each sounding board from outside Scotland. Their perspectives encouraged participants to reflect on why they deliver Housing First in the way they do, and to learn from examples of good practice from other countries. The Housing First experts included a mix of academics, policy experts and those with practical experience of delivering, and improving, Housing First programmes.
- **Stage 3: Shared Solutions Report.** Homeless Network Scotland provided a final 'Shared Solutions' report for the local authority and partners, compiling and presenting the evidence and information gathered from stages 1 to 2.
- **Stage 4: Explore Insights.** Homeless Network Scotland invited local authority teams, housing providers and support staff in 5 regional 'housing options hub' areas to come to a 'Housing First Connect' event to reflect on sounding board themes, and to share feedback and ideas on how Housing First is developing locally.

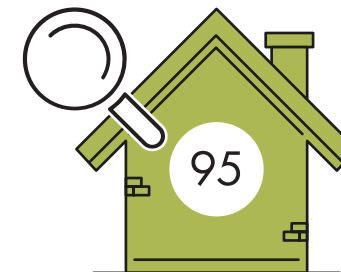
To complete the annual Check-up, Homeless Network Scotland:



Connected with **26** local authorities



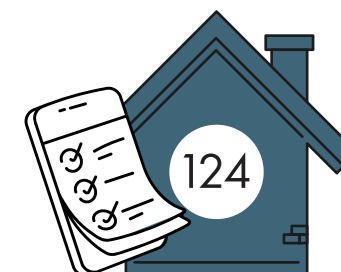
Facilitated **5** Housing First Connect sessions aligned with the Housing Options Hubs areas



Analysed over **95** self-reflection tools



Held **19** Sounding Board meetings



Received **124** tenants' survey responses

3. Feedback from Tenants

3.1 About the survey

Homeless Network Scotland prepared a digital feedback survey for people who had taken up a Housing First tenancy. Housing First workers helped to connect people with the survey, which contributed greatly to the number of people who participated.

The survey was incentivised by either a £20 Tesco voucher or bank transfer, down to tenant preference.

Four questions were asked in the Housing First survey, looking at the following areas:

- Referral and application
- Support
- Tenancy
- Involvement in Housing First

A total of **124 tenants** participated in the survey, answering these questions. Additionally, a free-text section was provided for general feedback, which was utilised by 114 respondents.

Responses were collected using a three-point Likert scale, broadly categorised as “Not Good,” “OK,” and “Working Well.”

3.2 Survey results

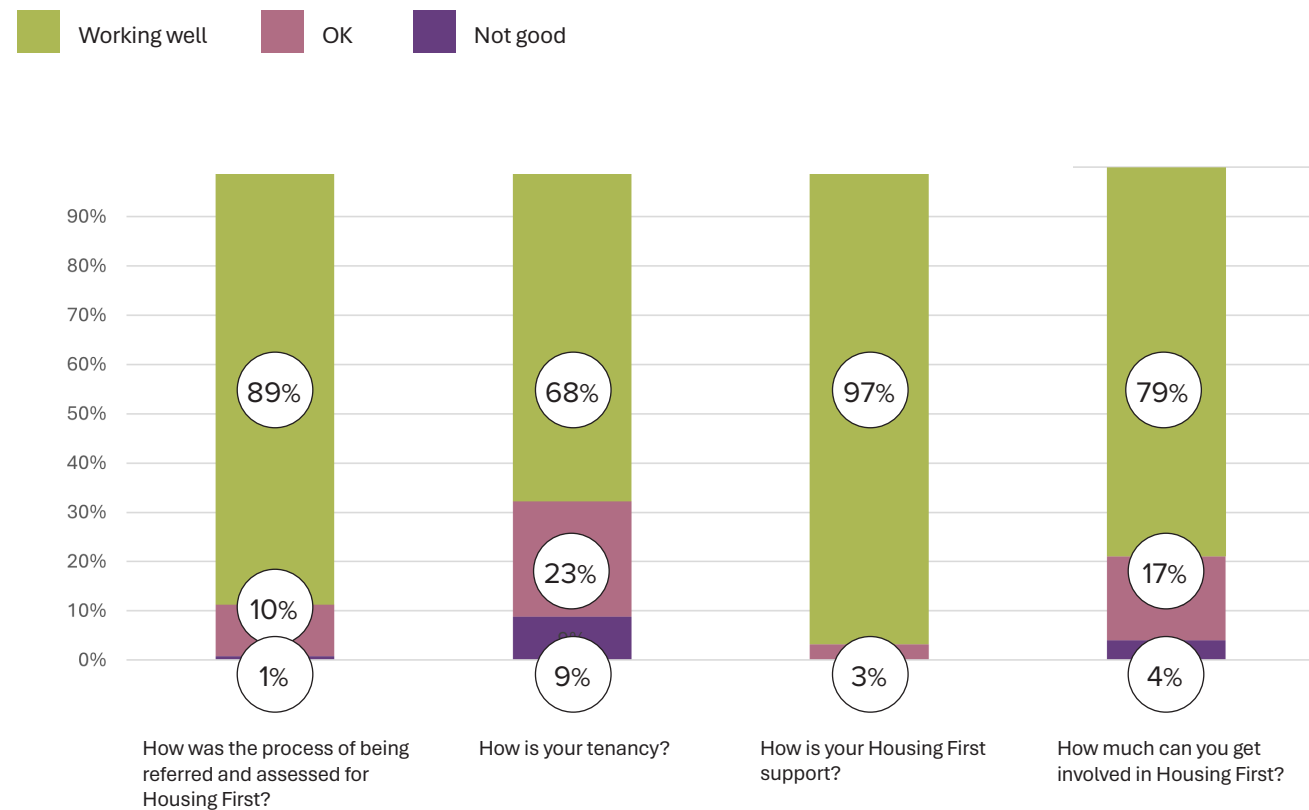
Overall, 51% of respondents reported being satisfied with all four elements of their Housing First experience. In every one of the four areas the majority of respondents said that things were working well.

As shown in the graph below, the support received was the most positively rated aspect, with 89% of respondents indicating that their support was working well for them. This was also the most frequently mentioned topic in the additional feedback section.



“My support is brilliant, and my support worker is friendly, patient and understanding, they are there when needed. I could not do without her; she is always trying to find other ways to help me.”

Housing First Tenant Survey Responses

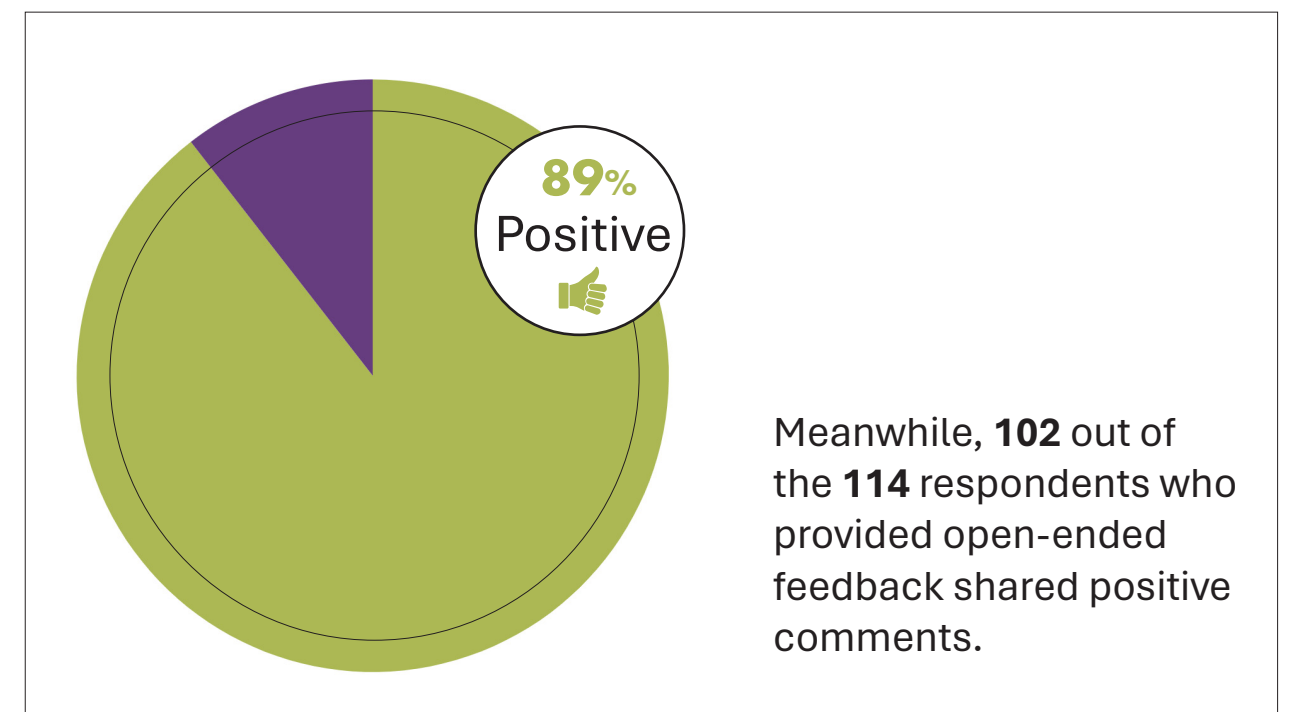


The one person who reported that the process was not good did however say that their feedback was listened to and used to improve the service, and that their support and tenancy was working well for them, demonstrating that their negative initial experience had not continued.

The most varied responses were related to **tenancy**, with 32% of respondents stating that their tenancy either does not meet their needs or could be improved. Further questions are needed to determine whether these concerns stem from the tenancy's location, the level of choice available in the process, or other factors.

Among the 114 respondents who answered the free-text question, only 12 provided suggestions for improvement. Of these, six mentioned **tenancy-related concerns**, though their responses highlighted different specific issues, as shown in the table. To gain a clearer understanding of tenancy challenges, future surveys will include additional multiple-choice questions on this topic.

Topic	Response from Tenant
Location	<i>I feel that my flat is isolated due to being far out of town. I need to travel into town for services, education, appointments. I don't always have money for bus fares so have to walk from my flat into town.</i>
Privacy	<i>I feel that my tenancy could be improved as I feel that in my bedsit it could be sectioned off for a bit more privacy.</i> <i>"Bedsit" in this local context means a self-contained 1-aprt studio flat provided by a housing association, not a privately let room in an HMO (house of multiple occupation).</i>
Decoration	<i>I've been left to decorate myself, I do have support with this, but I am struggling.</i>
Choice	<i>I was wanting to keep the temp accommodation I was in but was given an offer of housing instead.</i>
Size	<i>My tenancy is a bit small however it should be ok.</i>
	<i>I like my tenancy but need another bedroom for my child when he stays here, support is good.</i>



Most of these responses focused on the support they had received and their overall positive experiences. Here are a few examples:



“Throughout my support with housing first I have relied on their help. I don’t know where I would be without the support I have received. From the mainstream housing help to the referrals to Psychiatry, Substance team and others. Even just having someone to speak to. I honestly don’t know where I would be without Housing First.”



“My worker helps me with everything even when it’s not what they would usually do, they have also helped me build relationships with my family again and I am in a better place than I have ever been.”

This **word cloud** provides insight into survey responses, highlighting frequently used words with larger words indicating popular words and phrases:



3.3 Survey improvements

To build on the high interest among tenants to feedback on Housing First, the following considerations are highlighted for future surveys:

- Alternative approaches to distributing the survey to increase sample size are considered, including paper surveys.
- Asking a limited number of demographic questions would provide insights to help pinpoint if there were any specific groups for whom Housing First was or was not working for.
- While retaining a short survey, a few more questions can provide a deeper understanding. Questions which asked specifically what has made the Housing First experience particularly beneficial and multiple-choice questions to explore the housing and tenancy aspect should be included.



4. Housing First – what works

4.1 Observing great practice

Housing First continues to be an incredibly important and effective part of Scotland’s support for people who have multiple and complex needs, including those who have a history of rough sleeping and repeat homelessness. There is an enormous amount of positive practice and important stories of lives transformed and roots taking hold.

During the Check-up process, people delivering Housing First told us that they are enthusiastic and committed to the model because they see, every day, that it works. Many frontline staff spoke very positively about tenants who now had their own home, often for the first time, and the beneficial impact that this has on their wellbeing, stability and security.

We heard in particular about the benefits of long-term relationships between tenants and Housing First workers. Housing First has been in operation in some local authority areas in Scotland for over 15 years. For many Housing First tenants they have been supported over a long period of time, and frontline staff report that this is paying dividends in positive, long-term outcomes for tenants:



“Housing First works. We’re all working to the same kind of rulebook, there always is a flexibility within it and each person brings their own different dynamic there. But if we’re working to the principles of it, it’s definitely working.”

We heard about impacts such as tenants re-engaging with addiction recovery services, strengthening relationships with family members including children, tenancy sustainment, and improvements in mental health and in confidence.



“One woman had never had a tenancy before Housing First. It’s still early in her journey, but she has stability, comfort and a boyfriend.”

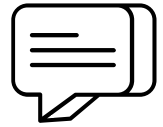
Some staff spoke about other commissioned and statutory partners not familiar with Housing First sometimes finding it difficult to understand that ‘success’ is not an end point, but rather ‘it is someone staying in a tenancy from day to day, someone engaging with support and living their life’:



“Homeless for 18 years, has now been in a Housing First tenancy for a year. That’s huge.”



Reports from tenant surveys confirm this positive picture of Housing First support. 89% of tenant respondents to the survey told us that their support was working well for them. Some of these responses demonstrated just how important this support was:



“Throughout my support with Housing First I have relied on their help. I don’t know where I would be without the support I have received. From the mainstream housing help to the referrals to psychiatry, substance team and others. Even just having someone to speak to. I honestly don’t know where I would be without Housing First.”



“My support is brilliant, and my support worker is friendly, patient and understanding, they are there when needed. I could not do without her; she is always trying to find other ways to help me.”

For examples of Housing First in action, see: <https://homelessnetwork.scot/housing-first>

4.2 Protecting the integrity of Housing First

Adhering to proven principles in any intervention is crucial because they represent a theoretically sound framework, refined through evidence and practice, which ensures consistent, effective outcomes.

This is especially true of Housing First, designed and tested to redress the inequality experienced by people with severe and multiple disadvantages, many of whom have been poorly served by traditional services. Housing First principles are designed to address core human needs with extended tolerances and persistence, creating a flexible and wraparound approach that is working in over 80% of cases in Scotland. The self-reflection tools used in Scotland’s annual Check-up process are designed around these internationally recognised principles to enable a measure of the extent to which delivery aligns with those principles.

It is very easy to get Housing First wrong. Therefore, it is testament to the extraordinary support provided by Housing First workers that so many tenants are so easily able to describe the life-changing impact of Housing First and the pivotal role of their Housing First worker in achieving that.

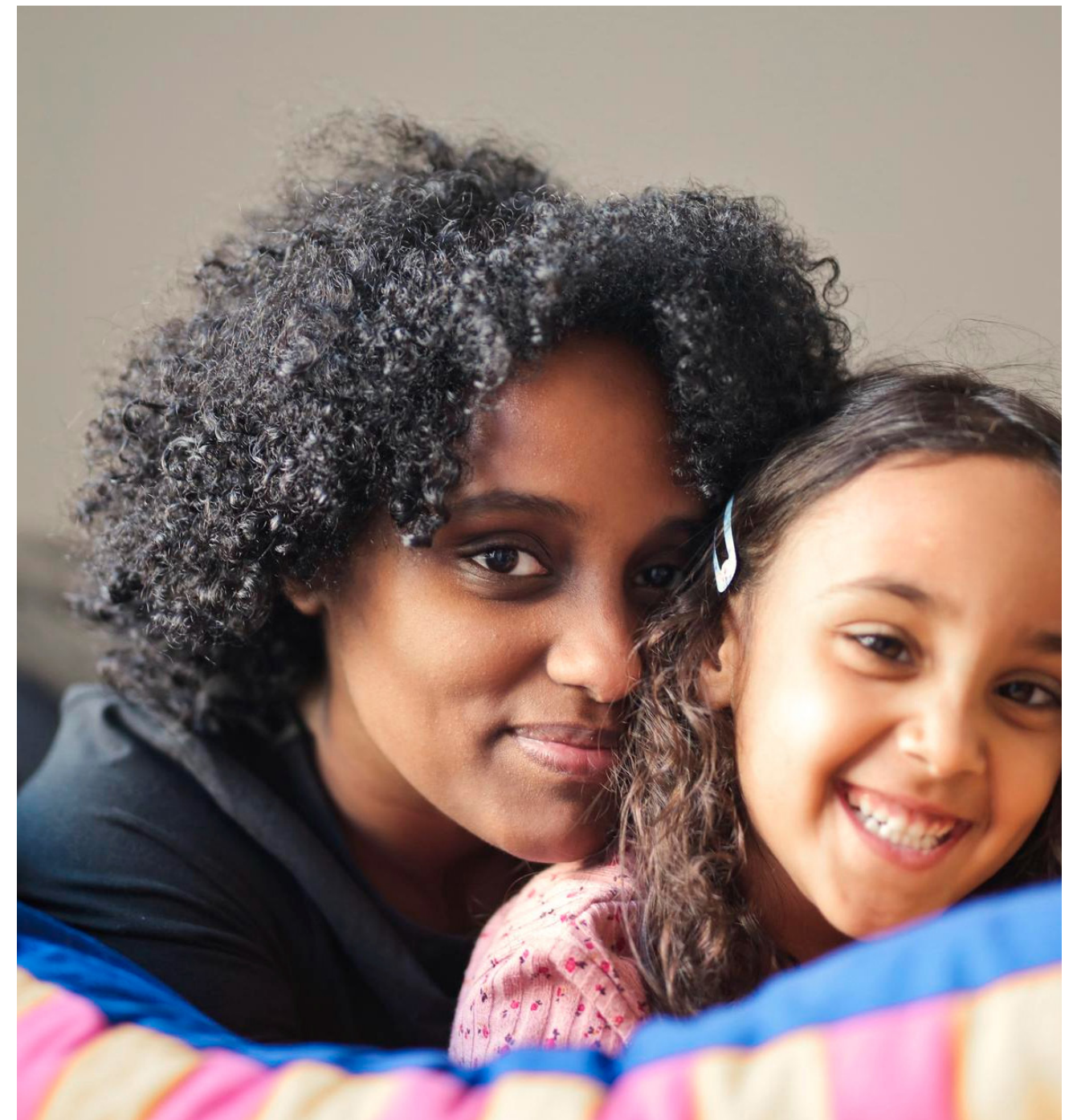
But this needs full and unconditional support from local authorities, health and social care partnerships and other key partners to ensure that the integrity of the model is protected and people prioritised. The overlapping nature of disadvantage in each area needs resolved by public services working in cohort with a cross policy and budgetary approach that can be achieved through Housing First.

In the absence of this alignment, staff on the ground spoke about increasing referrals, often of more complex cases, with long waiting lists for those who want Housing First support. Some local authorities restricting referrals through additional criteria such as age, with Housing First only available to those 26+ years. Others have expanded, or were at risk of expanding, caseloads so they could take more referrals, departing from what is known to work.

The Check-up process has highlighted that Housing First has not yet matured and shared aspirations for it are still a long way off. The next phase needs a higher strategic acknowledgement of Housing First at local level, underpinned by a theoretical and practical understanding of the principles that make it work:



“Dealing with lots of crisis means there is less time to spend on developing practice and service. If we don’t improve there’s a danger that we’re Housing First in name but not in practice.”





5. Common Themes

Six common themes have been identified from the range of reflection and feedback during the Check-up process. They are:

- Strategic commitment
- Multi-disciplinary impact
- Sustainable footing and funding
- Housing First in a housing emergency
- Prevention of homelessness
- Sharing learning

A summary of each theme, with specific priorities for urgent consideration, is provided below:

5.1 Strategic commitment

Housing First is not just a homelessness response, it is one of the most important interventions that Scotland can make for people at the ‘hard edges’, facing severe and multiple disadvantages.

In June 2025, the Scottish Government’s Public Service Reform Directorate published 15 case studies of preventative interventions introduced in Scotland in the period since devolution.

Housing First was among the 15 interventions².

The Housing First Check-up process provides a valuable and unique insight into the development and delivery of Housing First across Scotland. The challenges identified in the previous Check-up were around funding, upscaling, tenancy support and sustainment, housing supply, multi-disciplinary partnerships and recruitment and staffing pressures.

Throughout this year’s Check-up process, it has been very clear that these key challenges stubbornly remain year on year, with little sign of improvement arising from strategic national or local planning to address key issues.

Findings from the Check-up process provide a highly valuable framework to focus in on the steps needed to ensure that Housing First is available to all who can benefit from it, and that it is provided in a way that delivers maximum impact. This is essential for ensuring that those who are living with severe and multiple disadvantage have a settled home with the support that they need to thrive; this is also essential for ensuring that public funds are used with the greatest efficiency and effectiveness.

Housing First is a key public service for people in Scotland who are in greatest need. There is considerable benefit in using this year’s Check-up report priorities to help improve the delivery of this vital public service.

2. <https://www.gov.scot/binaries/content/documents/govscot/publications/research-and-analysis/2025/06/learning-25-years-preventative-interventions-scotland/documents/learning-25-years-preventative-interventions-scotland/learning-25-years-preventative-interventions-scotland/govscot%3Adocument/learning-25-years-preventative-interventions-scotland.pdf>

Notably, a trend we started to track last year, the number of children living in Housing First tenancies is increasing, from **18 children in March 2022 to 137 by March 2025, with 77 active Housing First tenancies now including children.** The circumstances of these families are not known, so it is not possible to draw any conclusions on whether Housing First is instrumental in enabling access to children. But this continuing rise, combined with anecdotes from local authorities and support providers during the check-up process, merit further exploration.



Many local authority and third sector Housing First staff also told us about their concern, despite the evidenced successful impact of Housing First, that they were not confident that it is a priority for national or local government. Much of this concern was related to the lack of long-term and sufficient funding and their own progress or ability to mainstream Housing First costs in local budgets. Other concerns relate to a lack of engagement from other relevant public bodies in Housing First and the overall impact of a shortage of housing

One local authority is no longer providing Housing First, and in other local authority areas there are early concerns they are not able to commit to Housing First Principles as they would like, due to the range of issues summarised above. These local authorities are redesigning services to provide housing support, but with larger caseloads, less meaningful choice and sometimes temporary accommodation rather than access to settled housing.

In some other local authority areas, Housing First is still delivered according to the key principles, but staff are worried that commitment to doing so is waning and uncertain.

PRIORITY 1

Renewed political commitment from Scottish Government and COSLA and, in this year before election, across all political parties to prioritise and accelerate the scaling up of Housing First, ensuring robust policy support and dedicated resources for its nationwide expansion.

5.2 Multi-disciplinary impact

Partnership working

In many local authority areas, Housing First thrives because of excellent partnerships with other public bodies, particularly criminal justice, mental health and addiction services.

We heard about multi-disciplinary panels of staff meeting regularly to discuss cases and quickly identify potential Housing First tenants, and that these panels work well for generating successful referrals to Housing First from other services, sharing information, and shared problem solving.

Housing First staff spoke about a strong culture of trust between partners, and that these good connections help shared risk assessment. This joint-working approach also eases referrals for Housing First tenants to the support they need from other services, particularly mental health and addiction recovery services. In some areas, the multi-disciplinary approach to frontline case decision-making is paired with strategic delivery partnerships that includes health and social care partnerships (HSCPs) and alcohol and drug partnerships (ADPs).

Housing First staff spoke about the considerable time and resource that they have put in to engaging with diverse partners. Staff have given presentations to partners, share regular data and organise visits to increase awareness. They spoke about the continuing need to do so to mitigate against the loss of awareness when key staff leave their jobs. There has also been some success where specific health professional posts are funded and placed to directly work with Housing First tenants.

Staff also spoke about the challenges of partnership working. Some in other public services misunderstand Housing First and view it simply as a route to get someone a house more quickly. Others see Housing First as a route for automatic referrals of all those facing severe disadvantage, without considering a person's choice or circumstances. One respondent commented that sometimes it seems like 'colleagues are trying to offload people' and there is not always clear understanding of the need for individuals to have the free choice to choose whether they get Housing First support or not.



“Housing First is being left to fix issues other services can’t address.”

There are also tensions in managing the number of referrals when they go beyond the budget or capacity of Housing First. Considerable good partnership working is required to manage and communicate about the nature and number of referrals. Some staff emphasised the importance of in-person, rather than online, meetings with partners to build good relationships and understanding.

PRIORITY 2

Local partners should acknowledge Housing First practitioners as the coordinators of cross-sector wraparound support, not as the sole providers of support. Awareness and understanding of Housing First among frontline staff across wider public services would enhance its integration and impact.

Cross-sector benefit

In common with the findings of the previous Check-up report, there was a sense that Housing First is still stuck as being seen only as a homeless issue or response:



“Housing First is not housing only. A stable, secure tenancy is the starting point to help tackle the non-housing needs of people who have been homeless. This means that Housing First is as much of a health, social care and community justice policy as it is a housing and homelessness one.”³

There is an ongoing lack of understanding of the ways in which Housing First has positive impact across the goals of diverse public services and actually saves them money in the long run. For example, we heard about Housing First support leading to less ambulance callouts to people at risk, lessening pressure on the NHS. We also heard about Housing First reducing repeat offending, lessening the pressure on the criminal justice and prison systems.

Housing First is building a reputation for success beyond homelessness services. Unfortunately, some respondents told us that in some ways, it has become ‘a victim of its own success’, leading to other adult services misinterpreting the service. Staff told us that overwhelmed mental health services and addiction services are using Housing First referrals to offload their caseloads and then stepping back. This is a serious misunderstanding of Housing First.

Other adult services need supported to understand that Housing First works only in combination and collaboration, not in isolation. Housing support services are not, and must not be seen as, a substitute for specialist care – rather, as facilitating the wraparound support that people need.

Housing First was developed in the US as a health intervention where success depended on rapid access to housing. In Scotland, although the benefits of Housing First go well beyond housing itself, Housing First remains almost entirely funded through housing and homelessness budgets. There are very few examples of health, addiction or mental health services putting any funding into Housing First despite the clear positive benefits in these areas. Staff spoke about the need to raise the profile of available cost benefit analysis of Housing First across public services, to inform and direct partnership conversations and planning around cross-agency funding.

PRIORITY 3

The cross-sector benefits of Housing First must be more widely recognised and integrated into collaborative planning strategies at a national and local level. The strategic commitment to Housing First (5.1) and the sustainable funding of it (5.3) also needs supported by health and social care partnerships, alcohol and drug partnerships, health services and community justice services.

3. Homeless Network Scotland, Housing First Scotland Annual Check-up 2023-24

5.3 Sustainable footing and funding

The Scottish Government has provided Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan (RRTP) funding for eight years. The first 5-year cycle was from 2019-2024, where Scottish Government awarded £62.5 million to local authorities to assist them with implementation of their rapid rehousing transition plans. This was extended in each of the 3 years 2024-27, with an annual budget of £8 million. In September 2025, Scottish Government also committed to a £1m uplift for Housing First in RRTPs in 2025-26, alongside a £3m capital grant for Registered Social Landlords to acquire suitable properties for Housing First. This funding was designed and allocated to local authorities to help facilitate change and the transformation towards a system of rapid rehousing. The mainstreaming of Housing First is a core component of RRTPs.

However, there is no doubt that the original ambition for Housing First, and for RRTPs overall, has been hampered by three major factors:

- Global factors: the pandemic and its aftermath, cost-of-living crisis, and the international displacement of people due to conflict and unrest. This had a knock-on effect on the budgets and resource planning of national and local government and housing associations.
- UK-wide factors: including UK government fiscal policy and the impact of welfare benefit reforms and immigration policy on people and planning in Scotland, with a further knock-on effect on the budgets and resource planning of national and local government.
- National factors: a social housing deficit that has been accumulating for decades, leading to the Scottish Parliament’s declaration of a housing emergency in 2024, with 13 councils also declaring local housing emergencies to date.

These extenuating circumstances bring an urgent need for clear, long-term funding commitments for Rapid Rehousing, including Housing First, to be established in collaboration between Scottish Government, local authorities, health and social care partnerships and other local partners.

Housing First in many local authority areas continues to be fully or partially funded from RRTP funding. However, the reliance on the year-by-year extension of RRTP funding has meant that Housing First delivery partners are unable to plan ahead and have a long-term strategy; waiting for Scottish Government and Parliament budget process to have any certainty around whether their service will still exist beyond April each year. This comes in the context of a precarious situation for many third sector organisations generally, where multi-year funding is scarce and funding decisions come very late.⁴



“We are delivering a long-term service with short-term funding.”

4. See reports and information from SCVO Fair Funding work: <https://scvo.scot/policy/fair-funding-procurement/fair-funding>

This funding uncertainty has significant impacts on staff and staffing, as well as significant knock-on effects on tenants. Housing First projects put considerable time and resource into training and developing staff to take on these highly skilled roles, which require considerable knowledge and ability to handle complex and challenging situations. There were many examples of very committed staff who believe in the approach and are passionate about supporting the tenants to overcome the barriers that they face. Tenants benefit considerably from staff who have built up excellent connections with other local services and this takes time and experience.

However, funding uncertainty means that many staff have to cope with continual employment uncertainty. This also leads to higher staff turnover and loss of important knowledge and expertise. It can be difficult to recruit staff when they can only be given a temporary contract. Some Housing First delivery partners said that this was particularly a problem in their rural area.

Importantly, funding uncertainty has very negative impacts upon the relationship between staff and tenants. Throughout the Check-up process, Housing First providers emphasised that key to the effectiveness of Housing First support is the trust built up between the staff member and client. Such trust, especially for clients who have experienced trauma and who have often had negative engagement with public services in the past, can be slow to build up and requires a long-term commitment.

Housing First staff spoke about the increased tenancy sustainment because they have been working with people over a long period. This, however, can be difficult when funding for the service is not long-term or certain. Staff cannot give tenants certainty about long-term support when they do not know if their service will continue.



“Some people who are offered a Housing First tenancy don’t believe it is real, that we’re going to give them a house in a place that they want and we’re going to give them intense support. They’re like, ‘no, that’s just not going to happen.’ So sometimes it’s that building the trust up. That’s the job.”

“We tell tenants it’s a long-term service, but is that really true? If their support worker moves on because of funding, trust is lost, and they have to build a new relationship.”

More clarity and consensus are urgently needed to reach a sustainable footing and funding for Housing First in Scotland. We observe that Scottish Government has provided eight years of transition funding intended to enable Housing First to be embedded within local budgets. However, local authorities highlight that exceptional housing, economic and social pressures have hindered this **transition and continue to seek dedicated funding to sustain and scale Housing First.**

We note an opportunity for constructive dialogue, potentially exploring flexible funding mechanisms, shared accountability frameworks, or innovative cost sharing models to align national ambition for Housing First with practical local challenges. By getting the funding part right, we can build on Scotland’s pioneering efforts in Housing First and set an exciting new international benchmark for how it is funded and scaled sustainably.

PRIORITY 4

Housing First needs sustained, multi-year funding to scale up without compromising quality in delivery. Scottish Government should commit to extending Housing First funding in the near-term to ensure continuous delivery. During this extended period, collaborative planning between Scottish Government, local authorities, health and social care partnerships and other local partners is essential to establish a robust, long-term funding strategy. This strategy should explore flexible funding mechanisms, shared accountability frameworks and innovative cost sharing models.



5.4 Housing First in a housing emergency

Along with service funding, the shortage of housing supply is the key barrier to Housing First being able to scale up to meet the level of need. 13 local authorities have declared a housing emergency – in these areas, there is insufficient enough social housing to ensure choice for Housing First tenants.

Heriot-Watt University carried out analysis for Housing First Scotland in 2020 which indicated that approximately 3,560 new Housing First tenancies are needed each year, over a 10-year period, to meet demand in Scotland as follows:

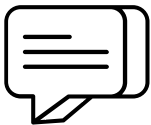
Housing First Demand Estimates					
Aberdeen City	221	Edinburgh	357	Orkney	6
Aberdeenshire	103	Eilean Siar	8	Perth & Kinross	73
Angus	60	Falkirk	103	Renfrewshire	124
Argyll & Bute	40	Fife	273	Scottish Borders	55
Clackmannanshire	49	Glasgow City	538	Shetland	7
Dumfries & Galloway	109	Highland	91	South 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

However, Scotland is currently still only meeting around 9% of the projected demand. **This is the same figure as last year – there has been no improvement.**

Professional experiences:

In one local authority, the housing emergency was given as a key reason for the scaling back of the Housing First model. Many local authorities felt able to identify potential tenants for the service who could benefit from Housing First but remained unable to scale up.

One staff respondent said:



“We are doing all we possibly can, but we will always be struggling against shortage of housing.”

Staff also spoke about long delays in voids being prepared, sometimes due to a lack of tradespeople. In some areas, people are given the choice of full decoration which takes longer before move-in, or decoration-light to speed up the process – the latter often being preferred by the tenant.

Others spoke about their concern about the poor standard of housing which can lead to problems for the tenants. For example, where a family who had experienced domestic violence were given damp and mouldy housing, which meant that they then had to move again.

There needs to be greater attention given to not only providing social housing in general, but also to finding ways to make sure that settled homes are available to those who face severe and multiple disadvantage, as part of the commitment to Rapid Rehousing. For example, at the time of writing, Edinburgh City Council has prioritised housing allocations to people who are homeless (with a few exceptions); some local authorities and RSLs prioritise allocations of housing to Housing First tenants. Flipping temporary, suitable housing where a tenant feels at home, into their settled accommodation has worked well in many areas.

Personal experience

The most varied responses to the tenant survey were also related to the housing provided, with 32% of respondents stating that their tenancy either does not meet their needs or could be improved. Tenants highlighted issues around location, privacy, decoration, choice and size. Notably, 68% of tenants thought that their tenancy was working well for them. (The nature of the survey did not allow for more in-depth analysis around people’s experience of their tenancy.)

The lack of social housing supply also limits the choice offered to tenants. Sometimes there is simply no housing available in their preferred location, or a lack of suitable housing such as 1-bedroom flats. Sometimes, for safety and wellbeing reasons, people want to move out of a particular area but there are no houses available elsewhere.

PRIORITY 5

Housing First needs a consistent supply of social housing to succeed. The Scottish Government should boost funding for the Affordable Housing Supply Programme and prioritise local authorities facing the greatest housing pressures. Local authorities and Registered Social Landlords should prioritise Housing First allocations and proactively address barriers that are slowing down and restricting housing options that are available.

5.5 Prevention of homelessness

Prevention is better than a cure. Across the housing and homelessness sector, there is recognition of the need to shift the system away from only responding to crisis, to instead focusing attention and resources on preventing homelessness.

Housing First repeatedly demonstrates its ability to prevent repeat homelessness through enabling tenants to stay in their homes. Tenancy sustainment rates for Housing First are over 80% after 12 months⁷.

During the Check-up process, professionals particularly emphasised prevention of homelessness for those on remand or on short prison sentences where providers used a range of different ways to keep tenancies open such as maximising use of Housing Benefit. Housing First providers sometimes are able to maintain contact and relationships with those in prison for short periods. Some councils have been able to pay for tenancies to remain open during longer sentences, particularly given the resource that another cycle of homelessness would entail. Respondents spoke about one case involving a longer prison stay where a repayment plan was arranged to clear rent arrears.

There is increasing recognition across many Housing First providers of the benefit of intensive support being available to those at risk of homelessness to enable them to remain in their home. The intensive, flexible and person-centred support from Housing First is exactly what some people need, and want, when they are struggling to sustain their tenancy.

Extending the criteria for Housing First referrals to those at risk of homelessness and with a history of repeat homelessness, aligns with the 6-month time period for the upcoming statutory duty on local authorities to intervene to prevent homelessness, as well as the duties on relevant bodies to ‘ask and act’.

It is important to note that such an extension of Housing First to intervene early to prevent, as well as respond to homelessness, would result in increased referrals for support but as people are already accommodated, no additional housing stock would be needed. This may also require local partnerships to reevaluate the referral route to Housing First as very often, a homelessness application is required to access Housing First.

PRIORITY 6

Local Housing First partnerships should investigate ways to develop, fund and expand capacity in support services, enabling early intervention to prevent homelessness and reduce repeat homelessness, while ensuring alignment with Housing First principles for both responsive and preventative outcomes.

7. The Scottish Government. *Housing First: monitoring reports: 1 October 2024 to 31 March 2025*
<https://www.gov.scot/publications/housing-first-monitoring-reports/pages/1-october-2024-to-31-march-2025>

5.6 Sharing learning about practice

Implementing Housing First effectively extends beyond securing a tenancy and providing housing support; it involves very practical elements to help people make their house a home and to build and live their lives in their community.

Homeless Network Scotland facilitated ‘Connect’ events as part of the Check-Up process, creating an opportunity for practitioners, along with planners and commissioners of Housing First, to come together to share practice and ideas.

Partners feedback how highly they value the opportunities to share insights on these practical aspects – such as sourcing furniture, involving tenants in decisions, accessing benefits, funds and grants and ensuring accessibility – and how it helps practitioners across sectors replicate successes and avoid pitfalls.

Specifically during this Check-up process, there were two recurring themes:

- **Furnishing.** The importance of people having choice about how their home is furnished being really important for making it a home. Professionals described many different ways that furnishing tenancies was managed, using different budgets and often applying to the Scottish Welfare Fund Community Care Grants.

People also spoke about using charity furniture shops, online furniture options, and local authority stores of furniture. Key themes included the importance of choice but that this was under strain due to either funding for furniture no longer existing, or being at an insufficient level



“Seemingly little things like carpets and white goods make a big difference.”

- **Listening to tenants’ views and experiences** – Housing First delivery partners have implemented a range of ways to gather tenant feedback and views, to help shape policy and practice. These have included surveys, small group discussions, or collecting feedback individually through support worker meetings. Staff spoke about different challenges in doing so, such as it being difficult to hear from people with a range of views.

PRIORITY 7

The transformative potential of Housing First deserves wider recognition. Those who plan, commission and deliver Housing First should seize opportunities to highlight its evidence-based impact and create platforms to amplify the voices and experiences of both practitioners and tenants.

6. Summary of priorities

Scaling up Housing First in line with local need has been a Scottish Government policy objective since 2018 and an important part of local authority plans to resolve homelessness and redress inequality.

While Housing First has shown significant promise in addressing homelessness, its implementation is still maturing and requires strategic collaboration at both local and national levels to unlock its full potential. To support its effective expansion and impact, the following recommendations should be prioritised:

1

Renewed political commitment from Scottish Government and COSLA and, in this election year, across all political parties to prioritise and accelerate the scaling up of Housing First, ensuring robust policy support and dedicated resources for its nationwide expansion.

2

Local partners should acknowledge Housing First practitioners as the **coordinators of cross-sector wraparound support**, not as the sole providers of support. Awareness and understanding of Housing First among frontline staff across wider public services would enhance its integration and impact.

3

The cross-sector benefits of Housing First must be more widely recognised and **integrated into collaborative planning strategies at a national and local level**. The strategic commitment to Housing First (5.1) and the sustainable funding of it (5.3) also needs supported by health and social care partnerships, alcohol and drug partnerships, health services and community justice services.

4

Housing First needs **sustained, multi-year funding to scale up without compromising quality in delivery**. Scottish Government should commit to extending Housing First funding in the near-term to ensure continuous delivery. During this extended period, **collaborative planning between Scottish Government, local authorities, health and social care partnerships and other local partners** is essential to establish a robust, long-term funding strategy for Housing First. This strategy should **explore flexible funding mechanisms, shared accountability frameworks and innovative cost sharing models**.

5

Housing First needs a **consistent supply of social housing** to succeed. The Scottish Government should boost funding for the Affordable Housing Supply Programme and prioritise local authorities facing the greatest housing pressures. Local authorities and Registered Social Landlords should **prioritise Housing First allocations and proactively address barriers** that are slowing down and restricting housing options that are available.

6

Local Housing First partnerships should investigate ways to develop, fund and expand capacity in support services, enabling **early intervention to prevent homelessness and reduce repeat homelessness**, while ensuring alignment with Housing First principles for both responsive and preventative outcomes

7

The transformative potential of Housing First deserves wider recognition. Those who plan, commission and deliver Housing First should seize opportunities to **highlight its evidence-based impact** and create platforms to **amplify the voices and experiences of both practitioners and tenants**.

Appendix (i): Acknowledgements

Homeless Network Scotland wants to thank everyone who took the time to contribute their expertise, insight and experience to this report, whether by filling in a self-reflection survey, a tenant’s survey, taking part in a sounding board or attending a Connect event.

We are grateful to the Housing First leads in the local authorities and their third sector partners who supported this Check-up process, both by participating and also by encouraging and coordinating others to do so. We hope that this report is interesting, insightful and most of all, valuable for your work.

We are also grateful to all the Housing First experts who generously gave their time and knowledge and added their expertise into the Check-up process and to this report. We know that it was also valued by the Housing First staff who benefitted from hearing your insights first hand. Many thanks to:

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- **Paul Rocks**, Housing First Cork
- **Julia Wygnanska**, Housing First Poland

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Appendix (ii): Participating local authority areas

Local authority	In delivery	To be confirmed
Aberdeen City Council		
Aberdeenshire Council		
Angus Council		
Argyll and Bute Council		
City of Edinburgh Council		
Clackmannanshire Council		
Comhairle nan Eilean Siar		
Dumfries and Galloway Council		
Dundee City Council		
East Ayrshire Council		
East Dunbartonshire Council		
East Lothian Council		
East Renfrewshire Council		
Falkirk Council		
Fife Council		
Glasgow City Council		
Inverclyde Council		
Midlothian Council		
North Ayrshire Council		
North Lanarkshire Council		
Orkney Islands Council		
Perth and Kinross Council		
Renfrewshire Council		
Scottish Borders Council		
Shetland Islands Council		
South Ayrshire Council		
South Lanarkshire Council		
Stirling Council		
The Highland Council		
The Moray Council		
West Dunbartonshire Council		
West Lothian Council		



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