Branching Out

The National Framework for Housing First in Scotland

2021-2031



SFHA

COSLA

Scottish Government
Riaghaltas na h-Alba
gov.scot

HOUSING FIRST SCOTLAND

Homeless Network Scotland
we are all in

Welcome

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

This Framework draws on the experience and expertise of partners across Scotland and provides a useful toolkit and reference for all those planning, commissioning and delivering Housing First.

This document replaces the version originally published in March 2021 and since reviewed and updated in:



March 2021



November 2021



June 2022



March 2023



December 2023



August 2024

Version
December 2025

Next Review
December 2026

Foreword



Màiri McAllan MSP

Cabinet Secretary for Housing

This year marks 15 years of Housing First in Scotland – a journey that has transformed how we respond to homelessness. Housing First has demonstrated that when people are provided with a safe and permanent home, alongside the right support, they can rebuild their lives and thrive. The Scottish Government is proud to have made Housing First a cornerstone of our Ending Homelessness Together strategy and our long-term vision in Housing to 2040.

Since 2019, we have invested over £84 million to accelerate this transformation by supporting local authorities to deliver Rapid Rehousing Transition Plans (RRTP) and Housing First, with funding now committed until 2026-27. Our commitment to Housing First was reinforced in the Scottish Government's response to Scotland's housing emergency, with an additional £4 million allocated specifically to scale up and sustain the delivery of Housing First across every local authority delivering it.

Branching Out sets out the next stage of this shared journey. It provides a practical framework for local authorities, housing providers, health and social care partners, and the third sector to expand Housing First, ensuring it remains an accessible option for people with the greatest need.

As we look ahead, we celebrate what has been achieved over the past 15 years, while recognising the challenges that remain. With the dedication of our partners across Scotland, I am confident that Housing First will continue to transform lives and help us realise our vision of a Scotland where everyone has the security of a home.



Maggie Brünjes

Chief Executive, Homeless Network Scotland

Housing First sets a higher standard for supporting people facing the most severe challenges, transforming individual lives while strengthening communities. It now sits at the core of national and local efforts to end homelessness in Scotland.

First published in 2021, Branching Out built on the success of Scotland's Housing First Pathfinder, providing the shared direction, consistency and coordination required to embed and scale this approach within rapid rehousing systems across the country. Since then, the declaration of a housing emergency has intensified pressures on services and on those experiencing homelessness. In such times, the moral imperative to prioritise people at greatest risk of harm is clear. Equally compelling – and urgently relevant for those managing stretched services – is the strategic and financial case: preventing the deepest harm to the worst-affected delivers the greatest system-wide benefits and cost reductions.

We therefore welcome the fresh political momentum behind Housing First, through targeted new investment and statutory duties on Scottish Ministers to report annually on progress towards greater scale. This updated Branching Out 2021-2031 responds directly to that ambition. It introduces the SCALE framework – Supply Homes, Coordinate Support, Adapt Funding, Lock-in Learning, and Ensure Equality – as five practical levers to accelerate and sustain expansion, from increasing housing supply to embedding learning and tackling inequalities.

We recognise and value the ongoing commitment of people with lived experience, frontline teams, local authorities, housing providers and national partners who drive this work forward every day. Together, we are branching out further towards a Scotland where everyone has the security of a safe, settled home.



Contents

Section 1: About this Framework 8
- a. How to use this Framework 9
- b. What Causes Homelessness? 10
- c. What is Housing First? 11
- d. Why Housing First? 13

Section 2: The Evidence 14
- a. International Gold Standard 15
- b. Evidence from across GB: 16
- c. Evidence from Scotland 17
- d. More Cost Effective 18
- e. Better For People 20

Section 3: Policy Environment 22
- a. Overarching Policy 23
- b. Housing Legal Framework 24
- c. Homelessness Policy 26
- d. Public Health and Health & Social Care Policy 29
- e. Community Justice 31
- f. Domestic Abuse 32
- g. Employment 33
- h. The Independent Care Review 33

Section 4: Equalities Considerations 37

Section 5: Raising the bar: the Annual Check-up 42
- a. Housing First Principles 43
- b. Housing First Check Up: assuring quality 46

Section 6: Route Map for Local Delivery 50
- a. Planning Housing First 52
- b. Sustaining Homes 64
- c. Helping Systems Change 70

Section 7: Scaling Housing First: Five Keys to National Success 74
- a. Local Need 75
- b. The SCALE Framework: Five Keys to National Success 76
  - Supply Homes 77
  - Coordinate Support 78
  - Adapt Funding 79
  - Lock-in Learning 80
  - Ensure Equality 81

Appendices 82

Section 1

About this Framework

Scotland is on a mission to ensure those facing the toughest homelessness challenges secure housing first, fast and with lasting support tailored to their needs. Scaling up Housing First in line with local need is now a national policy objective and an important part of local plans to end homelessness

a. How to use this Framework

This Framework is for all organisations and sectors who are planning, commissioning and implementing Housing First in Scotland.

- **Section 2:** Evidence for Housing First
  Provides an overview of the strong **evidence** and rationale for scaling up Housing First. This is useful to understand why and how Housing First works.

- **Section 3:** Policy Environment
  Sets out the relevant **policy** areas and establishes the overlapping nature of Housing First as an approach that requires partnership across a range of sectors.

- **Section 4:** Equalities Considerations
  Sets out additional considerations for ensuring Housing First, contributes to creating more **equality** in housing.

- **Section 5:** Raising the Bar: Annual Check-Up
  Summarises the Annual Check-up process that supports reflection, learning and improvement.

- **Section 6:** Route-map for Local Delivery
  Establishes what is needed to ensure Housing First in your area is effective, following proven principles and supporting new tenants in the best way.

- **Section 7:** Five Keys for National Success
  Provides an outline of the critical drivers that Housing First depends on to branch out successfully across Scotland and in line with local need.

b. What Causes Homelessness?

At least 8% of the Scottish population has experienced homelessness at some point in their lives, which makes it a constant and relatively common event. But we are not all at equal risk. Poverty is the main driver of homelessness, while childhood poverty is a key predictor of homelessness in later life. Homelessness and poverty affects people and places. This means that some groups of people are more at risk of homelessness and some communities in Scotland are too (see Section 4).

What increases the risk?

The health of local housing systems
The extent to which housing demand matches supply in the places people want to live and whether people are able to afford and access that housing rapidly.

The health of local labour markets
The extent to which potential employers of people in any occupational sector matches with the numbers and skills of people who are available for work.

The strength of the welfare safety-net
The extent to which the benefits system adequately supports low income households.

And what reduces the risk?

There are a range of protecting factors that can help prevent homelessness:

Access to adequate income and/or savings

Having positive relationships, social networks and support

A sense of belonging, being involved in meaningful activity with a valued role

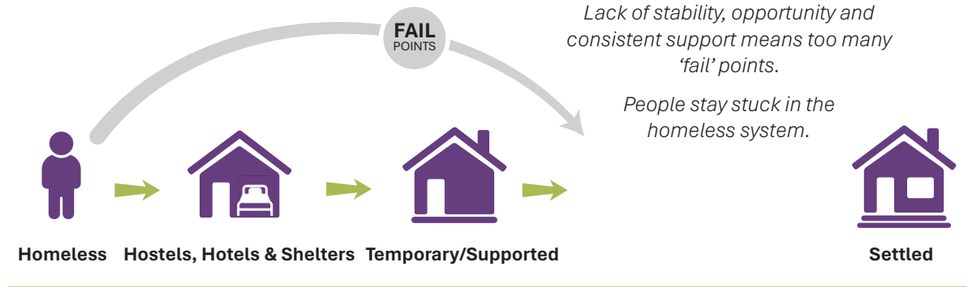
Useful advice, advocacy and information

c. What is Housing First?

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 – that is not time limited. 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 Readiness

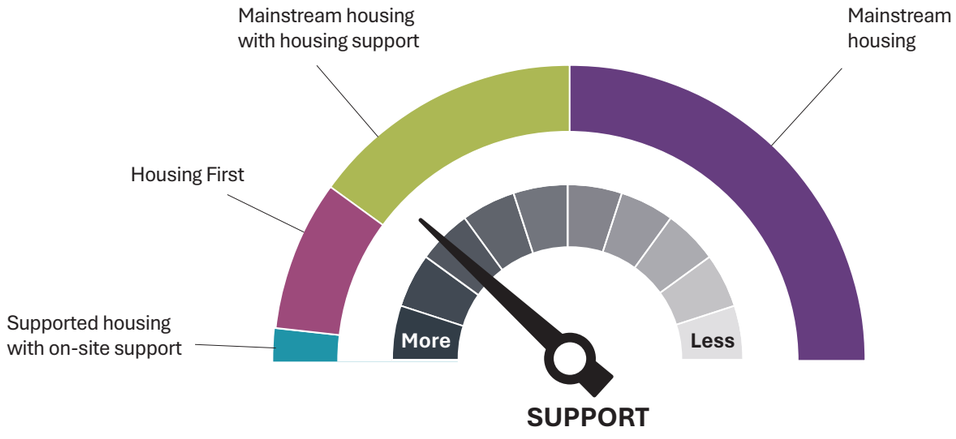
Fig.1 Housing Readiness v Housing First





Housing First is one part of Rapid Rehousing

Housing First sits within Scotland's transition toward a 'Rapid Rehousing' response to homelessness which has been underway since 2019-20:



Housing Support is Key:

- Around half of households who experience homelessness in Scotland also have support needs.
- The vast majority of housing support can be provided in mainstream housing.
- Around 10-15% of households who experience homelessness could benefit from a Housing First response.

d. Why Housing First?

Housing First is for people whose housing need is made profoundly harder by experiences with trauma, addictions and mental health. These experiences often prolong the time that people experience homelessness and the further damage this causes. Housing First provides access to a safe, secure home with the support people want to build and live their lives as part of a community.

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

☑ Housing First is normal

having a home is normal, everyone needs and has a right to one. Historically, a different response was normalised, often segregating people from their community in B&Bs, shelters and hostels and with long periods in temporary accommodation. It became common to assess whether people were 'ready' for a house at all, which still remains a small but stubborn practice. Housing First marks a return to home and community, the best base to build and live our lives.

☑ Housing First is fairer

homelessness is driven by poverty and inequality, which means some of us are much more likely to experience it. Scotland's universal right to housing is internationally regarded, but not everyone is able to fully exercise this right confidently. Housing First rapidly redresses what is often a lifetime of disadvantage and adverse experiences.

☑ 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 likely to stay housed and feel benefit in many other ways too. The approach delivers between 80% and 90% housing retention rates after two years, improving health outcomes, decreasing involvement in community justice and improved cost-effectiveness of service delivery.

☑ Housing First benefits all of us

by delivering transformative benefits across the board. For housing providers, it offers robust support and risk mitigation, ensuring tenancies succeed. For health and social care professionals, it drives meaningful outcomes, with stable housing improving physical and mental well-being. For public finances, it reduces costs by preventing cycles of homelessness and crisis care. And for cities, town centers and communities, Housing First creates safer and more inclusive environments, enhancing public spaces and promoting equality.

Section 2

The Evidence

There is overwhelming evidence, much of which is considered ‘gold standard’ in research terms, that indicates Housing First is:

- More effective at resolving homelessness than traditional interventions for this group.
- More cost effective than other approaches and responses to homelessness for this group.
- A more effective housing system as a result of more detailed scrutiny of local systems.
- Better for people with better housing and health outcomes.

a. International Gold Standard

Extensive implementation of Housing First across the United States, Canada and Europe has brought strong evidence that makes it (a) the most evaluated intervention to end homelessness and (b) the intervention with the strongest evidence of success in ending homelessness. This evidence shows us that:

- High housing sustainment rates of 80-90% can be achieved and maintained over long periods of time.
- People experience positive impacts on their capabilities and wellbeing, including their quality of life and recovery.
- Involvement in the criminal justice system is routinely reduced.
- People experience improvements in relation to their health and reductions in substance use.

Why does it work? Researchers at Heriot-Watt University identified four components that underpin the success **of Housing First:**

- The **longevity** of the housing and support provides a stable platform for people to address wider issues in their lives. Assuring people that the housing is theirs for as long as they need it and not limiting the time period for support takes away people’s concerns and anxieties.
- The **flexibility** of support, both the amount and type of support offered, allows for a person-centred approach which respects individual choice and gives people greater control over their own life. This flexibility also underpins long-lasting positive relationships between staff and tenants, overcoming previous experience of being ‘let down’ by services.
- The **stickability** of Housing First fosters trust and overcomes previous experiences of exclusion from services. By staying with people through tough times (e.g. relapse) and separating out their support from their housing security, it is easier to have the connections needed to ensure people get the help and support they want.The normality of mainstream homes in local communities – as compared to living in congregate homelessness services and other forms of temporary accommodation – offers what many experience as a way out of the destructive cycle they have experienced and mitigates stigma and supports integration.
- The **normality** of mainstream homes in local communities – as compared to living in congregate homelessness services and other forms of temporary accommodation – offers what many experience as a way out of the destructive cycle they have experienced and mitigates stigma and supports integration.

b. Evidence from across GB:

In 2024, the UK Government's Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government published the final synthesis report of the evaluation of the Housing First pilots (2018-2023). The pilot programmes aimed to develop the English evidence base on delivering Housing First at scale by funding, and robustly evaluating, three pilots in the Greater Manchester, Liverpool and West Midlands combined authority regional areas. The evidence presented in the final report combines findings from the Housing First pilot process evaluation, impact evaluation, fidelity reviews and cost-benefit analysis study.

An evaluation of the Threshold Housing First project for women offenders also shows that the Housing First model can be very effective for women experiencing severe and multiple disadvantage. Beyond positive housing retention outcomes, women reported increased self-esteem, improvements in health and wellbeing, and growing ambition.

In Wales, evaluation of combined homelessness interventions was published in 2024, which included Housing First. The evaluation used a case study design, involving 98 participants (including 17 with lived experience) across 13 diverse settings, through interviews, focus groups, and reviews of project data and policies. It found that Housing First projects demonstrated promising practices in supporting people with complex needs, particularly those experiencing repeat homelessness, trauma, mental health issues or criminal justice involvement. The flexibility of Housing First workers to address individuals' broader needs (beyond housing) was critical to success. While some projects showed strong joint working with health, social care, and criminal justice services (e.g., multi-agency triage teams, specialist homelessness nurses), others operated in isolation due to overstretched statutory services. While a lack of affordable and suitable housing limited the scalability of Housing First.

c. Evidence from Scotland

In Scotland, the final evaluation of Scotland's Housing First Pathfinder was published in November 2022, providing robust evidence in a Scottish context. The report draws from a combination of data analysis and first-hand testimony from tenants, support providers, local authorities and national stakeholders The headline finding is that the Pathfinder was highly effective at supporting people with the sharpest experiences of homelessness to stay in their homes. At the end of the Pathfinder, tenancy sustainment rates were in line with those recorded elsewhere internationally, with **88%** of people sustaining their tenancy at 12-months and **80%** at 24-months overall.

Prof Sarah Johnsen and Dr Janice Blenkinsopp's key messages from the Pathfinder evaluation provides reflections on the learning.

Since 2022, local authorities delivering Housing First have returned quarterly data to Scottish Government. The most recent data estimates that a total of **2,040** Housing First tenancies have started across Scotland at 30 September 2024. Tenancy sustainment rates are at **85%** after 12 months just one tenancy has ended in eviction. **27 out of 32** local authorities in Scotland are providing Housing First.

In June 2025, Scottish Government published the report 'Learning from 25 years of preventative interventions in Scotland'. Housing First in Scotland was among the 15 case studies selected as an example of successful preventative interventions introduced in Scotland since devolution. The report highlights that Scotland has been heralded as an international pioneer in Housing First implementation in an international review of best practice, with the level of political commitment the approach has commanded and pace of scale-up being noted.

Since 2022, Homeless Network Scotland has facilitated an annual check up process to monitor and report on how Housing First is branching out across the country. Section 5 – raising the bar – provides an update.

d. More Cost Effective

In Scotland, the final evaluation of the Housing First pathfinder 2019-22 documents the financial cost of Pathfinder delivery and reflects on whether it offered value for money. While a cost benefit analysis framework was developed at the outset of the evaluation, it was not possible to implement it given the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the collection of data.

Instead, the report analyses Pathfinder expenditure and unit costs at project level and overall, with analyses examining the potential for and actual changes in tenant's utilisation of public services and associated cost implications, with three broad conclusions:

the high levels of public service use by Pathfinder clients immediately prior to receiving support from Housing First indicate that there is significant potential for cost savings through delivery of positive outcomes for homelessness, police and criminal justice services and health services. The combined annual cost of these services was estimated to average at least £23,000 per client at baseline;

while estimates of actual changes in the costs of public service use can only be made for a very small sample clients, these are indicative of reductions in health service utilisation and a shift in balance away from the use of emergency health services (e.g. A&E and ambulance) toward treatment-based services (e.g. GP visits and hospital appointments). The limited available data indicates an increase in police and criminal justice service use costs to date;

the costed case studies presented highlight the potential for public cost savings and wellbeing improvements for individual people, but also the complexity of the problems and challenges they face, with attainment of sustainable positive outcomes likely to take some years.

Other evidence on cost effectiveness includes:

- A study of the delivery of Housing First in England calculates the average total costs for Housing First at £9,000 - £10,000 per person, per year. This is approximately 40% lower than annual costs for hostels, and approximately 60% lower than annual costs for high intensity fixed-site supported accommodation, all the while achieving positive outcomes and ending a person's homelessness.
- Research from Heriot-Watt University on Temporary Accommodation in Scotland illustrated weekly temporary accommodation costs ranging from £40 to £1,300 depending on the type, location, provision of support and source of funding. It concluded that a significant amount of money in the homelessness system is taken up by providing temporary solutions rather than permanent ones.
- Perth & Kinross Council launched their Housing First model in April 2017, although some of the components of their approach being developed as far back as 2009. They have demonstrated cost effectiveness and better outcomes for people. In 2019- 20, Perth and Kinross had the lowest prevalence of temporary accommodation usage in Scotland at 0.5 households per 100,000 population and the lowest length of stay at 76 days, they have saved an estimated £1m per year on B&B costs, and the shift of focus to prevention have avoided around £500K of costs per year.

- The range of international evidence also points at cost offsets for other sectors including emergency health services through reduced A&E visits, and justice services because of reduced offending. You can explore the international evidence for Housing First through the Centre for Homelessness Impact's online Intervention Tool.
- The cost benefit analysis for the 2018-23 Housing FIrst pilots in England estimate the costs of support provided and the value of benefits delivered. The costs of delivering the Pilots averaged £7,700 per person supported per year. The full benefits of the pilots are expected to amount to £15,880 per person per year, through improvements in personal well-being and reductions in the public service costs of homelessness. More than half of the value of these annual benefits were estimated to have been realised 12 months after participants had entered the programme. The benefit: cost ratio is estimated at 2.1 (based on expected benefits) and 1.1 (based on estimated benefits after only 12 months).

The Hard Edges Scotland research studied the extent and nature of severe and multiple disadvantage in Scotland. The research reported that homelessness services are often 'carrying the can' when earlier opportunities to support people have been missed. Local authority homelessness services are the most likely agency to lead, but with a lack of integration of addiction and mental health resources councils do not have the necessary authority to coordinate timely multi-sector interventions. This leads to rehousing outcomes being systematically worse for people and not improving over time.

e. Better For People

Housing First is for people whose homelessness is made harder by experiences with trauma, mental health, addictions, rough sleeping and the criminal justice system. These issues are often connected and lead to some people getting 'stuck' in the cycle and system of homelessness.

Studies around Adverse Childhood Experiences show that experiences in childhood such as abuse, neglect, community violence, homelessness, or growing up in a household where adults are experiencing mental health issues or harmful alcohol and drug use, can have a long-lasting effect on people's lives. And it is this effect that can be so often evident in the lives of the adults who will benefit most from Housing First.

Aye We Can, the most extensive national conversation with people with lived experience of homelessness across Scotland in recent years, prioritised housing first and fast. People were clear that they don't want to live in temporary or shared accommodation other than in an emergency and called for our focus to be on ensuring that people have a home of their own. People also wanted a joined-up approach to providing support and greater awareness of the realities of people's lives.

Evidence points us towards the scale of severe and multiple disadvantage in Scotland and the overall demand for Housing First. Statistical research into Health and Homelessness in Scotland shows that 6% of people experiencing homelessness also have evidence of mental health, drug-related and alcohol-related conditions (all three), rising to 11.4% for those experiencing repeat homelessness.

The Hard Edges Scotland research studied the extent and nature of severe and multiple disadvantage in Scotland. The research reported that homelessness services are often 'carrying the can' when earlier opportunities to support people have been missed. Local authority homelessness services are the most likely agency to lead, but with a lack of integration of addiction and mental health resources councils do not have the necessary authority to coordinate timely multi-sector interventions. This leads to rehousing outcomes being systematically worse for people and not improving over time.

Table 1: The table below gives an overview of those most likely to benefit from a Housing First approach, compared with Scottish Government's Housing First monitoring data to March 2025.

What Hard Edges Scotland told us	Who has benefited from Housing First in Scotland so far?	
Hard Edges Scotland tells us that those who will benefit most from Housing First are more likely to be male.	Gender	• **SIngle Male** 62% • **Single Female** 30% • **Single Parent** 6% • **Couple** 1% • **92%** of Housing First households are single people. Single Parent includes both male and female data
Hard Edges Scotland tells us that those who will benefit most from Housing First are more likely to be in the lower to middle age ranges, with few under 25 or over 65.	Age	• **16 - 17** 2% • **18 - 24** 17% • **25 - 34** 28% • **35 - 49** 40% • **50 - 64** 13%
Hard Edges Scotland tells us that the overwhelming majority of people who will benefit most from Housing First will be White Scottish.	Ethnicity	• **White Scottish** 94% • **Other British** 3% • **Other ethnic group** 3%

Section 3

Policy Environment

Scotland has a determined policy environment which understands what is needed to end homelessness and the role of Housing First in achieving it. Connecting right across a range of policy areas is needed for Housing First to succeed.

a. Overarching Policy

Scotland's National Performance Framework tracks performance towards agreed outcomes and indicators. Housing First can positively contribute to several outcomes contained within this Framework, including that people:

- live in communities that are inclusive, empowered, resilient and safe.
- are well educated, skilled and able to contribute to society.
- are healthy and active.
- respect, protect and fulfill human rights and live free from discrimination.
- tackle poverty by sharing opportunities, wealth and power more equally.

Further underpinning the delivery of the National Performance Framework is Community Engagement and Empowerment which focuses on supporting communities to do things for themselves and make their voices heard in the planning and delivery of services. Local Outcome Improvement Plans are the mechanism by which Community Planning Partnerships deliver improved outcomes for their communities. They are based on a clear understanding of local needs and reflect agreed local priorities and link to the National Performance Framework.

In July 2025, Scottish Government published the Public Service Reform Strategy. The strategy sets out commitments to change the system of public services – to be preventative, to better join up and to be efficient – in order to better deliver for people. It sets out how Scottish Government and partners will tackle systemic barriers to change.

The National Health and Wellbeing Outcomes Framework is also important in supporting the delivery of Housing First in Scotland through its focus on:

- people being supported to look after and improve their health.
- people living independently at home or in homely settings in the community.
- reducing health inequalities.
- keeping people safe from harm.

The Fairer Scotland Action Plan is the national overarching plan for tackling poverty in Scotland, which is a primary contributor to the experience of homelessness. The plan is based on a wide-ranging national conversation on what a Fairer Scotland would look like and has been translated into 50 key actions that aim to reduce poverty. 'Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plan 2022-26', the second tackling child poverty delivery plan outlines the actions the that the Scottish Government is taking to meet the child poverty target, of reduced child poverty to below 10% by 2030.

b. Housing Legal Framework

The safety and security of a settled home is the cornerstone of Housing First. The role of Scotland's housing associations and cooperatives is pivotal to the success of Housing First, and developments in relation to allocations policies and wider role activities are being facilitated by many social landlords. Underpinning this is the need to ensure an adequate supply of affordable and social housing in line with independently calculated rates and planning for the longer term housing requirements of Scotland's population, as outlined in Housing to 2040.

The Housing Contribution Statement is considered the 'bridge' between a Local Housing Strategy and Health and Social Care, and therefore an important lever for Housing First. The Housing Contribution Statement is intended to articulate the role of the local housing sector in the governance arrangements for the integration of health and social care and set out the shared outcomes, service priorities and strategic commissioning.

The right to housing in Scotland is often described as the strongest in the world and recent and forthcoming changes have particular implications for the delivery of Housing First. Some people who will benefit most from Housing First may have been assessed as intentionally homeless, reducing their accommodation rights and making it more difficult for their experience of homelessness to end. From November 2019, the duty placed on Scottish Local Authorities to investigate whether a person was intentionally homeless was removed, instead a Local Authority has the power to undertake this investigation if they think it is appropriate. This change removes potential barriers for some people experiencing severe and multiple disadvantage.

Changes to local connection provisions came into force in November 2022 which has suspended local connection referrals between local authorities. This change created more opportunity for people to choose where they want to live and move more easily across local authority boundaries, as it is recognised that a person is more likely to sustain accommodation if it is in an area they choose.

The terms of the Unsuitable Accommodation Order have been extended to cover all homeless households no longer only those with dependent children and/or pregnant women. This means that homeless households cannot spend more than 7 days in accommodation defined as unsuitable without the Order being breached. Increasing Housing First can support local authorities in Scotland to meet the revised terms of the Unsuitable Accommodation Order by moving people from temporary into settled accommodation more quickly.

Housing Supply

Housing to 2040 sets out the Scottish Government's long term strategy to deliver the affordable housing needed to end homelessness. In September 2023 the Scottish Government published proposals for rented sector reforms, based in the consultation it undertook on the A New Deal for Tenants strategy.

These reforms have been taken forward in the Housing (Scotland) Bill that was introduced to the Scottish Parliament in March 2024.



c. Homelessness Policy

Following an inquiry, the **Local Government and Communities Committee** of the Scottish Parliament made a series of recommendations in their 2018 report. Key to these recommendations was a focus on the development of a Scottish approach to delivering Housing First.

Rapid Rehousing, of which Housing First is one element, was the cornerstone recommendation of the **Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Action Group**, which met and reported throughout 2017 and 2018. Housing First recommendations were further strengthened when HARSAG was reconvened in 2020.

The commitment to implement recommendations from HARSAG and the cross-party committee is captured in the joint Scottish Government and COSLA **Ending Homelessness Together High-Level Action Plan**. This plan commits to ending homelessness by prioritising settled housing for all, including Housing First becoming the default response:

> ***"Someone who has complex needs and is homeless or rough sleeping or at risk of homelessness or rough sleeping should be housed in settled, mainstream accommodation that meets their needs – with wrap-around support in line with Housing First principles – as quickly as possible."***

With duties to implement homelessness policy and strategy sitting with the 32 Local Authorities across Scotland the planning and delivery of Rapid Rehousing and Housing First is underpinned by local 5-year **Rapid Rehousing Transition Plans**. These plans interface with the local statutory Housing Needs Demand Assessment (HNDA), Strategic Housing Investment Plan (SHIP) and Local Housing Strategy (LHS) to ensure that any local supply shortfalls are identified and plans put in place to ensure that the local availability of affordable housing matches the 5 year rapid rehousing vision.

Prevention Duty

The independent Prevention Review Group (PRG) was convened by Crisis and Scottish Government to take forward work on preventing homelessness identified by the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Action Group and the subsequent Scottish Government-COSLA Ending Homelessness Together Plan. The PRG's task was to identify legal duties on local authorities and other public bodies to prevent homelessness.

The PRG was chaired by Prof Suzanne Fitzpatrick of Heriot-Watt University and included local authority bodies and representatives from the housing and homelessness sectors and from health and social care. A wide-ranging consultation process was carried out, involving around 100 organisations from different sectors.

The PRG was supported by the Prevention Commission, a group of people with lived and frontline experience of homelessness, who met regularly during the lifetime of the PRG to discuss and shape the proposals. They emphasised the importance of keeping it simple, of choice and control for people facing homelessness, and of services working in partnership with them to find out what assistance they need to address their situation.

The underpinning principles of PRG were that:

- There should be a collective responsibility across public services to prevent homelessness.
- Intervention to prevent homelessness should start as early as possible.
- People facing homelessness should have an appropriate degree of choice in where they live and access to the same accommodation options as other members of the public, with protections in place to prevent them from becoming homeless again.

The recommendations of the Group intend to achieve the following:

1) Clarify, strengthen and extend a duty to prevent homelessness, and integrate it within the main statutory framework, so that local authorities assist anyone threatened with homelessness in the next six months.

2) Prescribe a range of reasonable steps to be used to prevent or alleviate homelessness, based on the existing Housing Options framework. These steps are to be included in a personalised and tailored housing plan that enhances applicants' choice and control. Where applicants have housing support needs these should be assessed and met.

3) Ensure the service meets the needs of specific groups at risk of homelessness by working with other services and partners, including for those experiencing domestic abuse, and those leaving prison, care and other institutions, those facing a threat of homelessness living in the private rented sector.

4) Ensure people requiring assistance to prevent or alleviate homelessness are assisted into accommodation which is available for a minimum of 12 months and suitable to their needs, with appropriate safeguards to ensure that homelessness does not reoccur. This would allow a wide range of accommodation options, allowing people choice and control.

5) Provide clarity and accountability in the system, giving people appropriate and effective rights of reviews and challenge throughout the process. There should be a comprehensive right to request a review of decisions at all stages of the process. Where the applicant is still not content with the outcome, they should have a right to challenge decisions through the Housing and Property Tribunal.

The Scottish Government consultation on the proposed legal duties to prevent homelessness closed in April 2022, and in November 2022, the Scottish Government and COSLA published a response to the consultation analysis. This welcomed the broad support given to the principles and many of the specific proposals for new duties outlined in the consultation and confirmed that further work will be undertaken with partners and stakeholders to develop legislative provisions for inclusion in a forthcoming Housing Bill and work to develop the supporting guidance. The Homelessness Prevention and Strategy Group appointed a task-and-finish group to make recommendations to ensure successful implementation of the homelessness prevention duties. This group's final report was published in August 2023.

The Prevention Duties were included in the Housing (Scotland) Bill that was introduced to the Scottish Parliament in March 2024. At August 2025, the Housing Bill is at Stage 3. You can follow progress of the BIll here.

The role of Supported Housing

The transition to Rapid Rehousing and Housing First is the driver for the role of supported housing and shared living to be redefined as a response to homelessness in Scotland. In October 2021, a policy direction was published following a qualitative research project commissioned by Homeless Network Scotland, led by Indigo House and with a research Advisory Group chaired by Prof Beth Watts-Cobbe, Heriot-Watt University.

The direction of travel recommended is toward supported housing as a *settled* housing option, for a *small* number of people who want support on-site. This should be modelled around a 'core and cluster' approach that is more commonly used by HSCPs for different health and support needs. Planning and commissioning should be led locally by HSCPs, with each supported housing integrated in the community and spanning a range of overlapping personal experiences and support needs so that it avoids stigmatisation of 'homeless accommodation'.

The key attributes of core and cluster models would be:

- Self-contained, individual properties usually described as flats or bedsits/studios – homely, with residents having their own bedrooms, bathrooms and kitchens. This also encompasses the need to respect private space with contact from support or other staff related to individual's care and support needs and avoiding an institutional approach.
- The 'core' would be the location of on-site care and support staff – often located in one of the flats in a block, or other nearby accommodation, 24-hours/7 days a week; this core may or may not include some common space.

The policy position and full research is available here https://homelessnetwork.scot/shared-spaces.

In 2022, the Homelessness Prevention and Strategy Group appointed a task-and-finish group to further develop this work. The final report and recommendations from the Task and Finish Group were published in July 2024 and is available here.

d. Public Health and Health & Social Care Policy

Scotland's Public Health Priorities sets out 6 priority areas. Scaling up Housing First will contribute to the delivery of:

- **Priority 1:** A Scotland where we live in vibrant, healthy and safe spaces and communities.
- **Priority 2:** A Scotland where we have good mental wellbeing.
- **Priority 4:** A Scotland where we reduce the use of and harm from alcohol, tobacco and drugs.

Housing First also contributes to the reform principles that underpin these priorities:

- Reducing inequalities
- Prevention and early intervention
- Fairness, equity, and equality
- Collaboration and engagement
- Empowering people and communities
- Intelligence, evidence and innovation

In June 2025, Scottish Government published Scotland's Population Health Framework. This sets out Scottish Government's and COSLA's long-term collective approach to improving Scotland's health and reducing health inequalities for the next decade. It has four guiding principles, which are to:

- Prioritise creating and maintaining good health and preventing ill health.
- Focus support on the people and communities who need it the most.
- Change systems and environments to support individuals to stay healthy.
- Deliver through a whole system approach – nationally and locally.

The Health and Social Care Delivery Plan aims for Scotland to have high-quality services that have a focus on prevention, early intervention and supported self-management. The delivery of Housing First can both support the delivery and benefit from a health and social care system that:

- Is integrated.
- Focuses on prevention, anticipation and supported self-management.
- Will make day-case treatment the norm, where hospital treatment is required and cannot be provided in a community setting.
- Focuses on care being provided to the highest standards of quality and safety, whatever the setting, with the person at the centre of all decisions.
- Ensures people get back into their home or community environment as soon as appropriate, with minimal risk of re-admission.

Those who benefit most from Housing First in Scotland are also likely to have significant health and social care needs in both the immediate and longer term. The success of Housing First is inextricably tied to the Health & Social Care agenda and strong partnerships with local Health & Social Care Partnerships. This should include:

- Health & Social Care staff contributing to the flexible, open-ended Housing First support that is central to ending people's homelessness and improvements in their health and wellbeing.
- Joint strategic planning to develop and upscale Housing First locally, ensuring it is embedded in all Health & Social Care plans.
- Joint approaches to commissioning Housing First to ensure adequate funding is available in the longer term to deliver high quality, flexible, open ended support.

Housing First can also make a clear contribution to a range of strategies that underpin the wider Public Health and Health & Social Care sector, including:

- Reforming Adult Social Care Support with priorities including a shared agreement on adult social care support and a focus on human rights, the delivery of social care support that is centred on the person, how they want to live their life, and what is important to them, investment in social care support and how it is paid for in the future, a valued and skilled workforce, strengthening the quality and consistency of co-production at a local and national level, and ensuring equity of experience and expectation across Scotland.
- The Scottish Government's Mental Health Strategy for 2017-2027 which promotes prevention and early intervention, access to treatment and joined-up accessible services. It also provides a focus on the physical wellbeing of people with mental health problems, people's rights and the use of information
- Rights, Respect Recovery: The Alcohol and Drug Treatment Strategy which focuses on the prevention and reduction of societal harms that increase risk and tackling health inequalities. The strategy commits to taking a human rights, public health and evidence-based approach.
- In 2022, the Scottish Drug Deaths Taskforce published Changing Lives, which sets out a suite of evidence-based recommendations and actions that will reduce drug-related deaths and harms and improve and save the lives of people who use drugs. It includes the recommendation that Scottish Government should continue to support Housing First and scale up the approach across all Scottish local authorities, and that learning from the Housing First model could be used to support the design of other services. In January 2023, Scottish Government provided a cross government response to the Drug Deaths Taskforce report, which included a cross government action plan that recommits to Housing First.
- Recovering our Connections 2023-26 a strategy for tackling social isolation and loneliness and building stronger social connections. This prioritises the promotion of positive attitudes and tackling stigma, the creation of opportunities for people to connect, and supporting an infrastructure that fosters connection.

The Scottish Government's 2021-22 Programme for Government committed to bringing forward legislation to establish a National Care Service. The proposals followed the Independent Review of Adult Social Care, which recommended the establishment of a National Care Service to bring together all adult social care support delivered in Scotland.

In May 2025, Scottish Government published a factsheet with Information about how they plan to move forward with the National Care Service in 2025 and beyond. View the joint housing and homelessness sector response to the Scottish Government's proposals for a National Care Service.

e. Community Justice

The Vision for Justice in Scotland **3-year delivery plan provides a high-level overview of the main areas of work that are being undertaken across the justice sector, and further significant reforms that will be introduced over the period 2023-26.**

- We have a society in which people feel, and are, safer in their communities.
- We work together to address the underlying causes of crime and support everyone to live full and healthy lives.
- We have effective, modern person-centred and trauma-informed approaches to justice in which everyone can have trust, including as victims, those accused of crimes and individuals in civil disputes.
- We support rehabilitation, use custody only where there is no alternative and work to reduce reoffending and revictimisation.

Housing First can play an important role in delivery of the National Aims and Priority Actions of the updated National Strategy for Community Justice. When an individual is in contact with the justice system, there is an opportunity to ensure that they are able to engage with the services that they will require in order to support their basic needs, to rehabilitate themselves, and not reoffend. Housing First can:

- create opportunities for early intervention to help prevent and reduce offending as early as possible and before problems escalate.
- help support people leaving prison, to ensure that those who would benefit from Housing First support are allocated a permanent tenancy with suitable wrap around support upon release where possible.
- bring partners together, recognising the need to prioritise victims' safe recovery from harm and trauma and the impact this can have on other outcomes.

support re-integration into communities for those who have committed offences, helping them realise their potential and creating a fairer and safer society for everyone.

The Presumption Against Short Periods of Imprisonment Order was passed by the Scottish Parliament in 2019 and currently sets a statutory presumption against sentences of less than 12 months for offences committed on or after 4 July 2019 in order to reduce the reoffending rate in Scotland. Alongside the range of non-custodial sentences available under the Order, Housing First can play an important role in offering secure housing and support to mitigate against the social factors that often contribute to criminal offences being committed.

HM Inspectorate of Prisons for Scotland has 9 Standards which are based on nationally and internationally agreed human rights law standards. Quality indicators are measured against the PANEL principles relating to Participation, Accountability, Non-discrimination and equality, Empowerment and Legality to ensure that the QI has met an adequate outcome. Standard 7 relates to Transitions from Custody to Life in the Community.

The Sustainable Housing on Release for Everyone Standards, commonly known as SHORE Standards, were developed collaboratively to deliver on the principle of maximising opportunities to provide stable, settled housing at point of liberation, with the aim of avoiding emergency accommodation.

f. Domestic Abuse

Domestic abuse is the primary cause of women's homelessness and so affects significant numbers of children and their long-term outcomes. Improving housing outcomes for women and children experiencing domestic abuse is the report of a Scottish Government working group in highlighted six areas which, acted on together, could significantly reduce domestic abuse related homelessness. One recommendation is that 'a Housing First pathway should be developed ... for women experiencing domestic abuse'.

The Hard Edges report notes that "While almost all of the women interviewed had experienced DVA, and this was reported by service providers to be almost universal amongst women facing the most complex forms of SMD, there was less experience of specialist refuge and other provision than one might expect. This at least in part reflects the fact that specialist refuge providers will not accept women with active addictions and chaotic lifestyles in some areas. Whilst this policy stance is understandable, given the imperative to keep refuges feeling safe for all of their residents, it does indicate the need to develop innovative provision for survivors of DVA facing SMD."

Domestic abuse: a good practice guide for social landlords is guidance for social housing professionals who are involved in developing policy in housing and homelessness services and in providing housing management and housing support services. The Domestic Abuse (Protection)(Scotland) Act came into force in May 2021 giving victims and survivors more choice and protection. This gives police and courts power to remove abusers from the home, and will give social landlords greater control to transfer tenancies to a victim/survivor.

In 2023, Scottish Government announced a scheme to provide financial support to help women and children experiencing domestic abuse to pay for the essentials they need when leaving a relationship with an abusive partner.

At 2025, the Scottish Parliament's Social Justice and Social Security Committee is looking

into the financial implications that women face when leaving an abusive relationship. The Committee wants to learn more about the support local authorities give to women leaving abusive relationships; how rules and practices related to the public sector and social security take account of the financial issues women can face when leaving abusive relationships; and how much information and advice is available from public bodies and charities. You can follow this inquiry here.

g. Employment

The No-One Left Behind: Next Steps for Employability Support can play an important role in supporting the success of Housing First across Scotland, building an approach to employability support that recognises the experiences of people experiencing severe and multiple disadvantage, with the strategy prioritising:

- Employability and Health (including substance use)
- Employability and Justice
- Employability and Housing

h. The Independent Care Review

The Promise sets out the ambition for Scotland to be the best place for children to grow up, requiring a fundamental shift in how decisions are made about children and families. Many people who will benefit from Housing First will be living with the legacy of a care system that did not always meet their needs and scaling up Housing First in Scotland will benefit from the full implementation of The Promise to protect children and families as early as possible, reducing the future experience of severe and multiple disadvantage.

Section 4

Equalities Considerations

We are not all at equal risk of homelessness and it does not affect everyone in the same way. Housing inequality is linked to poverty and to the protected characteristics named in the Equality Act.

This section offers a set of considerations to assist local partners undertaking an EQIA (equality impact assessment) of their Housing First service.

Evidence

Poverty is the primary driver of homelessness, in all its forms. Poverty is experienced differently by people of different ages, ethnicities, family roles and sex. The risks, causes and paths into homelessness are different for different groups and we need to understand these differences to respond to homelessness effectively. This includes, but is not limited to, people with one or more characteristic protected by the Equality Act 2010.

- 77% of homeless applicants are of white ethnicity compared to 93% of the adult Scottish population. Decreases were experienced across white ethnicities in 2024-25 compared to the previous year. For all other ethnicities, numbers were the same or an increase from previous year.

  Evidence about the characteristics of homeless households is available here.

- Most homelessness applicants are between 25 and 49 years old (63%). Around a quarter of applications are received from people under 25, which are more likely to be from female applicants.
- More men are homeless: 58% in 2024-25 and higher than previous years. 84% of those reporting rough sleeping in the previous 3 months were men. Men are also more likely to stay in unsuitable temporary accommodation, making up 72% of cases where councils breached their duties.
- The biggest difference between men's and women's homelessness is domestic abuse, with this being the main reason for women applying as homeless.

Equality evidence to support the Ending Homelessness Together Plan is available here which was last updated in March 2020.

Equality Duty and Policy

All Scottish public authorities have statutory obligations to meet in this area. The public sector equality duty (or general duty) in the Equality Act 2010 came into force in 2011 and means Scottish public authorities must have 'due regard' to the need to:

- eliminate unlawful discrimination
- advance equality of opportunity
- foster good relations.

In 2012 Scottish Ministers made regulations that placed specific duties on Scottish public bodies to help them meet the general duty. These are also known as the Scottish Specific Duties.



Considerations

	Considerations	Role of Housing First
Income Inequality	Homelessness risk is not distributed equally, and poverty is the greatest driver of homelessness in all its forms. Housing First has the opportunity to have a positive impact on those with a low socio-economic status.	Housing First redresses disadvantage by providing Housing First and fast. It connects people with community and with opportunities to learn and earn. Provision of furniture packages to furnish property, or access to a supervised budget to furnish property, as well as maximising benefits, applying for Community Care Grants and all other available funding sources.
Age	• Young people are over-represented in homelessness statistics overall. • Rock Trust are the first UK charity to pilot Housing First for Youth and have built up further evidence of the success of the Housing First model in a youth context, with a particular focus on the benefits to young people leaving care. • A Way Home Scotland is a coalition of individuals, organisations and authorities dedicated to ending youth homelessness in Scotland. • Consideration of people under 35 being subject to Shared Accommodation Rate of housing payments, limiting their choice in properties. • Older people are more likely to experience loneliness and social isolation, before and after a Housing First tenancy.	• Young people should always have access to youth specific services. Local Housing First planning and delivery should account for this and an over representation of young people. • Having longer assessment periods can help the young person make informed decisions by enabling a more flexible process. • The Rock Trust pilot in partnership with Almond Housing Association was independently and positively evaluated and you can read the final report here. • If affordable properties are not available in areas desired, apply for DHP to widen the choice for those under 35. • Strong focus on making connections in local areas to increase tenancy sustainment and reduce risk of repeat homelessness.

	Considerations	Role of Housing First
Sex/ Gender	• Men are more likely to be rough sleeping, in unsuitable temporary accommodation and now make up the largest population in hotel accommodation in Glasgow and Edinburgh. Men are at increased risk of suicide ideation or attempts. • Women benefit equally from a Housing First approach, but with often different pathways to support. Here you'll find an excellent online resource of evaluations and guidance relating to Housing First for women. • Domestic abuse is the key reason for homelessness among women without access to routes to support and safety. • Additional considerations around Housing Benefit shortfalls if pregnant women are housed in 2-bedroom properties.	The Scottish Government working group report 'Improving housing outcomes for women and children experiencing domestic abuse' (Dec 2020) recommended that: A Housing First pathway should be developed within RRTPs for women experiencing domestic abuse. This should be in collaboration with VAWG partnerships and specialist support services such as Women's Aid and Rape Crisis. It should integrate the principles of Equally Safe and the Safe & Together Model. HARSAG 2020 recommendations include to: ***R46.*** *Upscale Housing First to extend support to those with complex needs who are a) housed, but at risk of repeat homelessness b) currently in public institutions including Local Authority care.* ***R47.*** *Establish a Housing First pathway for women with complex needs.* Ensure pregnant women housed through Housing First receive DHP if shortfall in Housing Benefit arises due to spare bedroom (i.e. child's future bedroom).
LGBTQ	• 1 in 4 LGBT people experience domestic abuse. • LGBT young people are over-represented in the young homeless population. 24% of young homeless people are LGBT; 77% state that their LGBT identity was a causal factor in becoming homeless.	HARSAG 2020 recommendations include to: ***R46.*** *Upscale Housing First to extend support to those with complex needs who are a) housed, but at risk of repeat homelessness b) currently in public institutions including Local Authority care.*

	Considerations	Role of Housing First
Race	For some ethnic or religious groups communication barriers, stigma, prejudice, or cultural differences can prevent or delay positive outcomes. Subliminal racism from services, or from local communities where people are resettled, could act as a barrier to accessing services. For example, the Gypsy and Traveller community may face barriers to accessing services. There are higher rates of poverty and higher rates of ill health in some ethnic groups. Homelessness in Scotland has increased by a third or more for ethnicities that are not white across all categories, except Caribbean/Black. Unconscious bias shapes our behavior, influencing judgments and decisions through ingrained assumptions and thought patterns. To mitigate this, we must slow our decision-making, reflect on our reasoning and challenge cultural stereotypes we accept as true.	Staff involved in the delivery of Housing First Scotland should be supported, trained and encouraged to highlight issues, challenge unconscious bias and provide culturally sensitive responses.

	Considerations	Role of Housing First
Disability	Many people with disabilities and their carers face extra costs, yet are missing out on the social security benefits they are entitled to. **Mental Health** Poor mental health is both a cause and consequence of homelessness. There is a higher rate of mental health problems amongst the homeless population than the general population. This is often exacerbated by the stressors of housing vulnerability, the requirement to share accommodation and navigate complex systems. **Physical Disability** Local issues of availability of accessible properties and length of time to have properties adapted. **Learning Disability** Can create difficulty communicating aspirations to support provider. Requires support staff to have clear understanding of learning disability. **Neurodiversity and communication problems:** Can cause frustration, confusion and anxiety.	Housing First can offer more independence, autonomy and peace of mind. Housing First should have clear referral pathways to income maximization services. This should include looking at any disability and carers benefits individuals might be entitled to. Enhanced staff training for practitioners to ensure understanding of impact of disability on pathways to Housing First and successful tenancy sustainment.



Section 5

Raising the bar: the Annual Check-up

a. Housing First Principles

Housing First is built around a set of principles to meet, rather than a series of specific tasks or activities to deliver. And the international evidence is clear that the higher the fidelity to these principles, the higher the level of sustainment and wider outcomes. The 7 Housing First principles with examples of how they can be met are below:

Housing First Principle	Examples of Meeting this Principle
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.	**Progress towards achieving this includes:** • All Housing First tenants have either a Scottish Secure Tenancy or a Private Residential Tenancy. • No tenants are required to spend time in supported accommodation, rehab etc. before being offered their own tenancy. • All tenants have choice over where they want to live, and report that their choice was respected. • All tenants move into their home within 6-8 weeks, or as close as possible. • The average time for tenants to move into their homes reduces year on year.
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 improved.	**Progress towards achieving this includes:** • There are no requirements in place for people to accept Housing First support, and tenants can opt out of support without it impacting upon their tenancy rights. • There are no time limits placed on the provision of support, no minimum or maximum number of hours or duration of time. • Decisions to end support are led by the Housing First tenant.

Housing First Principle	Examples of Meeting this Principle
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.	**Progress towards achieving this includes:** • Decisions to end support are led by the Housing First tenant. • Proactive joint work to prevent evictions for rent arrears or anti-social behaviour. • Tenancies remain open for tenants to return to following a short-term prison sentence or stay in rehab. • Ended tenancies do not result in repeat homelessness, with people supported by the landlord and support provider to move into another secure tenancy. • Support staff continue to offer support through time spent in prison, rehab and house moves.
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.	**Progress towards achieving this includes:** • Support packages are co-produced, and tenants report being part of decisions about the nature of their support including choice over content, timing, frequency and staff. • Support packages are regularly reviewed, and changes requested by tenants are implemented. • Tenants report being actively involved in choosing the location, tenure and type of housing based on their own priorities.

Housing First Principle	Examples of Meeting this Principle
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.	**Progress towards achieving this includes:** • Caseloads are small and support staff report being able to commit necessary time and attention to each tenant. • Cases are not closed due to missed meetings or lack of contact. • Housing First tenants report support staff proactively building positive relationships.
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 work alongside people to identify strengths, goals and skills, building self-esteem and confidence.	**Progress towards achieving this includes:** • Support planning is future focused, based on positive goals in people's lives. • Tenants report improvements in health and wellbeing. • Tenants report improvements in self-esteem and confidence. • Tenants report improvements in social and economic integration.
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.	**Progress towards achieving this includes:** • Caseloads are small and support staff report being able to commit necessary time and attention to each tenant. • Cases are not closed due to missed meetings or lack of contact. • Ensuring that residential rehabilitation can be accessed and does not impact on the Housing First tenancy.

b. Housing First Check Up: assuring quality

Homeless Network Scotland and Scottish Government facilitate an annual check up process for all local authority areas providing Housing First in Scotland. In the first year (2022-23), 13 local authorities participated. In the second year (2023-24), 25 local authorities participated in the check up process. In 2024-25, 26 local authorities participated in the annual check-up process.

The Approach

Housing First Check-up underpins Housing First in Scotland to support:

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

Countries that are scaling up Housing First have adopted different approaches, including structured accreditation processes.

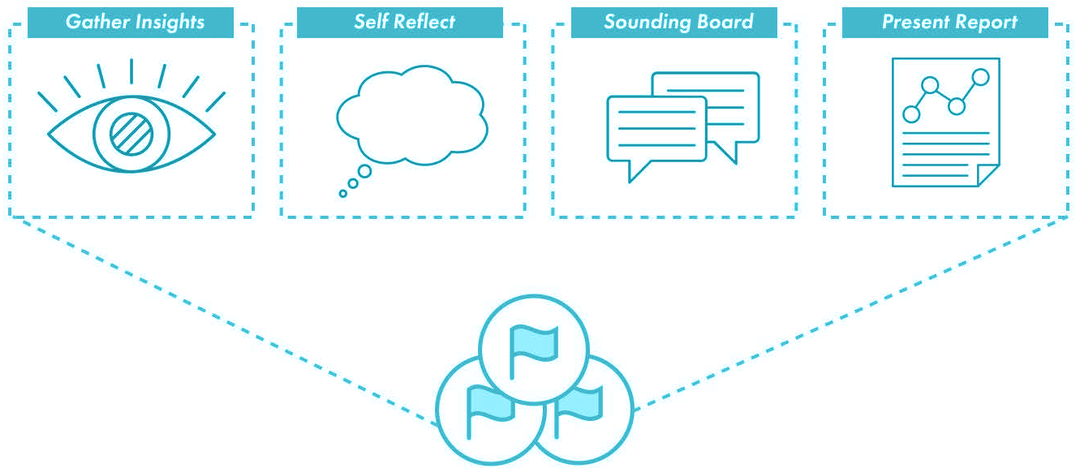
In Scotland, a collaborative and self-reflective approach has been adopted to create a culture that recognises that Housing First planning and delivery is challenging but the outcomes rewarding. This approach recognises that local authorities and partners are naturally reflective, already committed to 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. Homeless Network Scotland's role, working in partnership with Scottish Government, is to:

- Facilitate a 360^0 feedback culture that recognises every perspective matters.
- Provide tools and materials to support self-reflection.
- Summarise and interpret the full range of data.
- Identify excellence and potential that can be shared within and across areas.
- Facilitate access to an expert sounding board from outside Scotland.
- Report constructively to local authorities and partners.
- Support developments that push through on local outcomes.
- Summarise collated learning at national level.

The Method

The stages each year are:



Stage 1	Level
Gather Insights	**Regional Hub**

Evidence and insights facilitated or reviewed by Homeless Network Scotland via:

- An in-person or online 'connect' event inviting a wide range of local stakeholders.
- Check-in with people receiving Housing First support.
- Data returns on Housing First from local authorities to Scottish Government.

Stage 2	Level
Self-Reflect	**Local Authority**

Local authorities and partners self-reflect on progress towards meeting Housing First principles:

- Small selected group 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 a Red-Amber-Green matrix, the questionnaire asks people to reflect on core indicators for each of the 7 Housing First principles.
- Homeless Network Scotland collates the range of returns from each local authority area and highlights areas of consensus, areas where there is a difference of opinion, and areas to prioritise.

Stage 3	Level
Sounding Board	**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' to feedback on the information collated so far and areas of challenge. This panel also offers an opportunity for local authorities to benefit from the experience and expertise of Housing First experts from across the UK and internationally.

Stage 4	Level
Report	**Local Authority**

Homeless Network Scotland provides final 'shared solutions' report for the local authority, collating and presenting the evidence and information from stages 1-3.

Homeless Network Scotland incorporates learning into Branching Out: the National Framework for Housing First during regular updates.



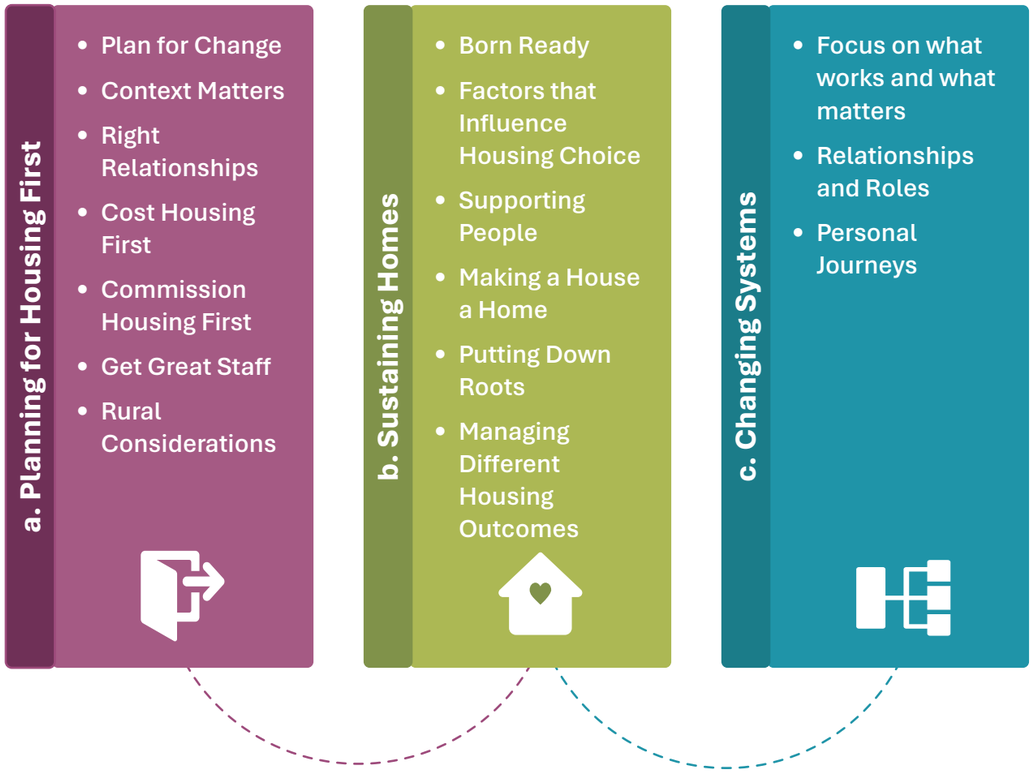
Section 6

A Route-map for Local Delivery

From pilots to pathfinder and now branching out across Scotland. This section is intended to help local partners branch out Housing First.

Useful steps to take, whether you are planning or commissioning Housing First or delivering support on the ground:

- Planning for Housing First
- Sustaining Homes
- Changing Systems



a. Planning Housing First

Learning And Action Points

Key Takeaways

Join up policy and plans across housing, health, social care and more.

Establish local scale and determine viable pace for Housing First in your area.

1. Plan For Change

Determine strategic priorities that correspond with the range of local strategies and policies outlined in section 3.

Determine the **pace and scale** conditions for Housing First relevant to your area and:

- Establish how many people will access your Housing First programme each year.
- Ensure you have a clear, consistent and shared criteria for people to access Housing First in your area.
- Identify the number of homes (both social and private rented sector homes) that can be accessed across your area. Determine how housing allocation policies will be used.
- Quantify the expected levels of support and the resources required to deliver this. Consider:
  - The remit and overlap of service managers and coordinators, in relation to direct Housing First support staff.
  - Rural, dispersed areas that may not be able to maintain the same staff:tenant ratios as populous cities.
  - How open-ended support can be provided, maintained as long as necessary, scaled back when it's no longer required, and intensified during periods of crisis or increased need.
- Determine approach to information sharing and GDPR. While there will be clear and reasonable boundaries when it comes to sharing sensitive information, partners can work together to find ways of working that prevent it being a significant issue. One example relates to early assessment, where local authorities have different statutory obligations and constraints than partners in the third sector. This has been overcome with a shared assessment process with both sectors working in tandem.

Learning And Action Points

Key Takeaways

Every area has a different context so Housing First delivery will look different.

More important is ensuring that the 7 principles that underpin Housing First are met.

2. Context Matters

Every area starting-up or scaling-up Housing First will encounter its own challenges and be required to make changes and developments within its own context – social, geographical, political.

Choice and control, including over the location, tenure and type of home someone wants to live in, is central to Housing First, as is people moving into their own home as quickly as possible.

But it is important that this choice is placed in the 'real-world' context of local housing markets and availability which are different in each area. The broader work to improve these contexts is also vital and outlined at section 7.

Some challenges are common, and these are summarised below.

- **Housing stock: area and availability**. A Housing First approach needs housing to be available as quickly as possible, and in areas that people want to live. Demand for Housing First greater than housing supply is a key frustration, but progress can be made when sourcing and allocating housing is actively prioritised.
- **Housing stock: access and readiness**. The importance of a home being made available that is of a good standard, ready to furnish so that rent arrears for any period prior to move-in are avoided. Communication is key among housing and support providers and with tenants to pin-point where and when the home will be available, when move-in can reasonably be expected, and what is required to ensure it is at a comfortable standard.

Learning And Action Points

Key Takeaways

Context Matters

- **Housing Systems.** Housing First has operated within choice based letting systems, common housing registers and in stock transfer areas. This means that Housing First allocations are being delivered in very different contexts and how to achieve the most rapid and effective approach across these different housing contexts is still being developed.
- **Multi-agency working.** Many of the challenges outlined in Hard Edges Scotland have their roots in the isolated and siloed ways of working that makes our systems more difficult for people to navigate. The reality on the ground is that it takes huge effort, patience, and willingness to achieve progress in this area – but that the results are significant. Creating multi-disciplinary teams should be a key first step when starting Housing First.
- **Consider direct housing allocations to Housing First**
  There are many more people that can benefit from a Housing First approach in each part of Scotland. Local authorities and partners need support and encouragement to keep branching out further and more rapidly. 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.

Learning And Action Points

Key Takeaways

Establish structures at strategy and operational level.

Get support from Elected members.

Create a platform for lived experience.

Involve lots of landlords from the start.

3. Right Relationships

- **Identify local partners** across the homelessness, housing, addictions, health and justice sectors (among others) as well as organisations with specific practical skills, for example furniture provision or home decoration.
- **Housing associations** are integral and in most cases want to be involved in the planning and delivery of Housing First, not just in providing houses. The relationship between the Housing First support worker and the landlord is pivotal.
- Most areas have created **Governance and Delivery** (or Operations) Groups. What partnerships and forums are already in place that will add value to Housing First? What the key issues and priorities are for your area will help determine who should be involved in governance and operational delivery structures:
  - Delivery Groups comprise key partners involved in the day-to-day activities of the Housing First service: support providers, housing providers, local authorities and health and social care partnerships.
  - Governance Groups take a more strategic view with partners including Police Scotland, DWP, Integrated Joint Boards, Councillors, Health, Housing Providers, Transport, Prison Service, Scottish Government and more. This multi-agency cross-sector approach to governance and delivery can help Housing First connect into broader policies and processes.

Learning And Action Points

Key Takeaways

Right Relationships

- **Engage Elected Members** and leaders, utilising the community and financial benefits of Housing First. Keep them involved through regular progress reports.
- There are a number of ways that people with **lived experience** can impact and improve Housing First; valuing and agreeing the importance of doing so is key. The benefit of empathy through similar experience is well understood, and 'peer support workers' is an option that has been successfully developed and deployed as part of a team of support workers. Meaningful involvement in governance and delivery structures can be a good way to reality-check the way services are being developed; training and support should be made available to enable people to do this in a way that is comfortable and appropriate.
- 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.

Learning And Action Points

Key Takeaways

Maximum caseload is 7 people for every support worker.

Per-person, per year cost range is £6,500 - £9,500 with the higher range more relevant to rural and remote locations.

This cost reduces from the second year in tenancy.

4. Costing Housing First

While it is important that 'best-value' continues to be fine-tuned, modelled, tested and scaled, we can use what has been learned to begin developing a national cost-model for Housing First in Scotland.

Some degree of variance is to be expected as operating contexts differ, so the direct costs for scaling up Housing First can expect to be within the following range:

Expected Range of Direct Costs for Housing First in Scotland

- **£6,500 - £9,500 per person, per year from year 1 in tenancy**
- **£5,000 - £8,000 per person, per year from year 2 in tenancy onwards**

This expected range draws learning from the Pathfinder cost model, and so includes the costs associated with support staff, management costs and furnishing a tenancy when the tenant moves in. This is a per-person cost not a per-tenancy cost; should a tenancy not be sustained the support for the person should continue.

Other **direct costs** were not accounted for within the Pathfinder but identified as a result of it. All are in relation to additional staff capacity: for local authorities to enable rapid engagement, referral and assessment processes. And for housing associations, the additional time needed to engage with local governance and delivery arrangements and to allocate housing within a new structure.

There are additional **indirect costs**, but not directly attributed to Housing First as they would need met within any mainstream tenancy. These universal costs includes housing costs, energy costs, void turnovers, repairs and maintenance. And the cost of access to mainstream health and social care services.

Learning And Action Points

Key Takeaways

Housing First is more cost-effective than status quo.

A commissioning focus on community integration can help maximise use of local services and activities.

Value local and lived experience when commissioning Housing First.

5. Commissioning Housing First

A robust and inclusive commissioning approach can ensure two things:

- That the delivery of Housing First is commissioned against, and therefore tied to, the principles of Housing First. Section 6 discusses in more depth the need for services to maintain fidelity to the principles across every context and embedding this into the commissioning approach is key.
- That current and local context can be considered while also commissioning for the future. This requires local partners to take account of current factors – including people and demography, systems and processes, housing stock and supply – and commissioning against plans for the future, including the Rapid Rehousing Transition Plans.

Commissioning will be different depending on the area of delivery but there are some key factors that could be considered regardless of context. These are outlined below:

- **Furniture costs.** The capacity to make people's house a home in the way they want helps tenancy sustainment. Some of the options available include furniture packages facilitated by housing providers, bulk purchasing, local channels and personal budgets/credit cards for tenants. The Scottish Welfare Fund may be able to provide some of these costs, but may not provide a sufficient grant to ensure the tenancy is fully furnished. A budget of approx. £1,500 factored in per person for the first year in tenancy.
- **Local knowledge and experience.** Scaling up Housing First within complex systems and processes, and effecting appropriate changes along the way, is a key challenge. Commissioning processes should account for a high level of local knowledge and experience with providers close to the communities in which they operate.

Learning And Action Points

Key Takeaways

- **Local knowledge and experience.** Scaling up Housing First within complex systems and processes, and effecting appropriate changes along the way, is a key challenge. Commissioning processes should account for a high level of local knowledge and experience with providers close to the communities in which they operate.
- **Lived experience.** People with lived experience of homelessness can provide advice and insights on the development and delivery of services. Building this into your commissioning approach ensures that investment is directed to what works and what matters.
- **Timescale and longevity.** A necessary tension between delivering and commissioning Housing First is the indefinite nature of the support that goes hand-in-hand with the tenancy. A strong focus on community integration within support contracts can help people settle and connect with local services and opportunities more quickly, and over time reduce the intensive Housing First support appropriately.
- **Integrating Housing First.** Housing First is one part of a larger rapid rehousing transition. Consider when commissioning how it fits in relation to, for example, outreach support and housing support to help avoid duplication and increase joined-up services across local homelessness services.
- **Commissioning evaluation and learning** is always useful, but a careful framing will ensure this built-in component is useful and does not start from scratch. For example, there is little need to commission evaluation on research questions such as 'does Housing First work?' and other questions where the evidence is already robust.

Learning And Action Points

Key Takeaways

Get great staff by using a salary scale that recognises the competencies of a great Housing First support worker.

6. Get Great Staff

The evaluation of the pathfinder found that the success of Housing First hinges, in large part, on the relationship between frontline staff and individuals being supported. The support worker's role is a difficult one given the challenging behaviours they often encounter, intensity of support required by many tenants, and barriers frequently encountered when brokering external support. The Pathfinder highlighted the critical importance of providing adequate levels of supervisory support, including clinical supervision, and opportunities for reflective practice.

Finding the right people to deliver Housing First support is not easy, as the role demands a significant level of expertise, local knowledge, confidence, energy and patience.

Some considerations for staff recruitment

- Recruit in a way that gives your organisation/area the best opportunity to appraise who a person is and what they can bring to the role. Exercises that provide an insight into the applicant's values and approach have been more successful than traditional interview setups.
- Housing First staff work in roles and circumstances that can be stressful, intense and exhausting. Those working on the frontline are required day to day to support people often at points of crisis. The staff who make Housing First work have a wide set of skills and the capacity to work within challenging situations.

Learning And Action Points

Key Takeaways

- In developing and building teams to deliver Housing First, partners should expect and plan for risks such as staff burnout and vicarious trauma. Reflective practice, appropriate job packages, extensive and ongoing training should be built into recruitment processes, as should time and resource to ensure staff wellbeing.
- Guidance for frontline delivery salaries of between £25-£30k per annum has been largely met by local authority support teams, but a range of £18-£25k across third sector services has been more universally adopted. There is also large variance within local areas delivering Housing First, which has impacted on recruitment.
- While salary is only one factor in recruitment and retention, a geographical area where wide salary differences appear will, in the long-term, lead to inconsistencies in delivery and potentially issues around consistent levels of support and credibility.

Learning And Action Points

Key Takeaways

Rural delivery of Housing First tends to be less siloed with more established multi-disciplinary working.

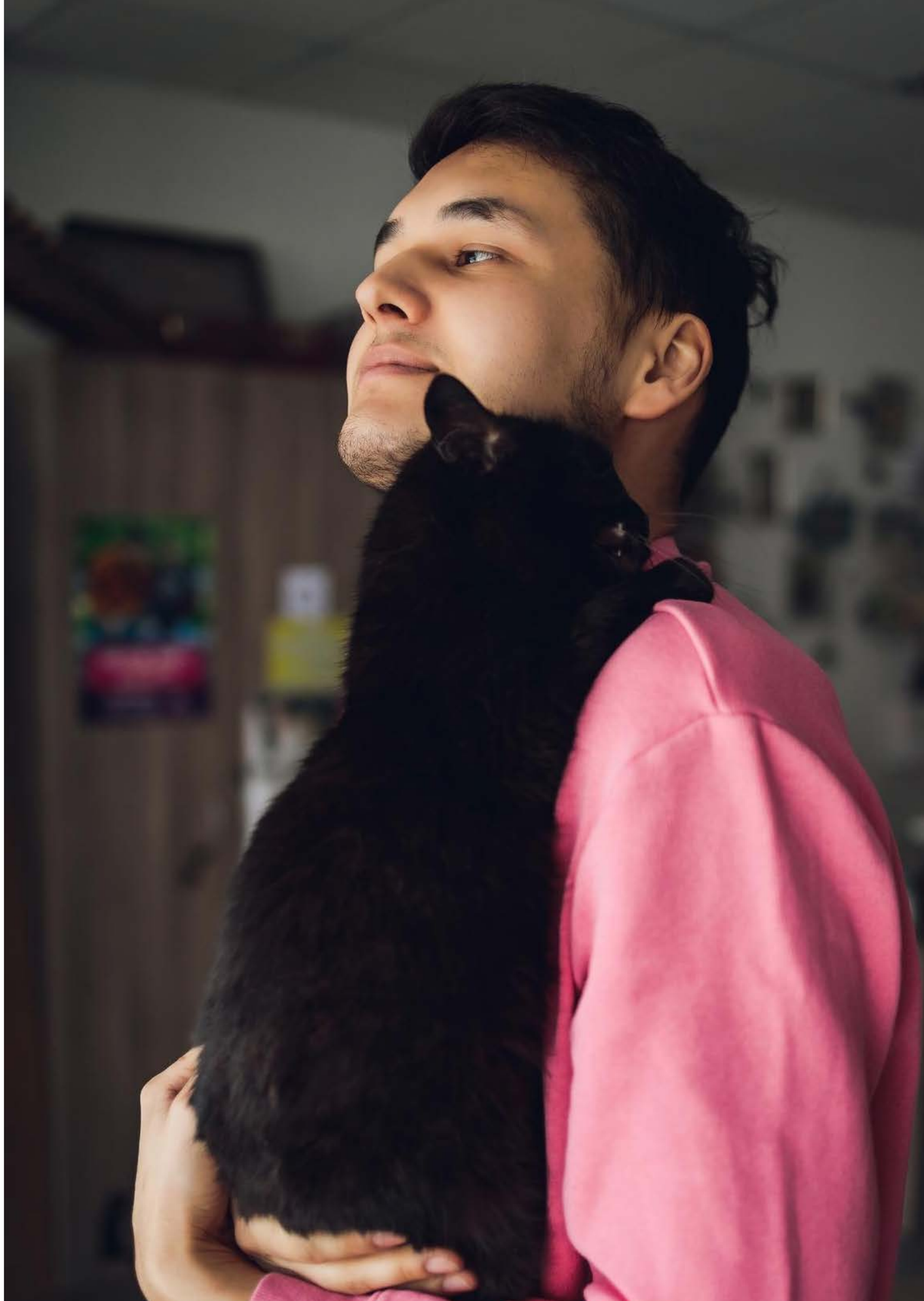
7. Rural Considerations

There are a number of rural authorities already well underway in their transition towards a system of rapid rehousing and Housing First. While the scale is smaller and there are less challenges of long-term rough sleeping, it is recognised that moving people into temporary accommodation – in a location where they have no connection or networks – along with multiple moves between different temporary accommodation placements leads to poor outcomes.

Aberdeenshire became one of six areas delivering Scotland's Housing First Pathfinder tasked with identifying and sharing the challenges, solutions and learning to successfully scale up Housing First in a rural setting. This has proved fruitful to date and Aberdeenshire's progress before and during the Pathfinder has shown very positive outcomes.

Some other considerations include:

- How do services in a rural context, where populations and services are spread widely, work with the principles of Housing First whilst delivering an effective and efficient service?
- What reasonable adaptations to the Housing First model could increase effectiveness in a rural context?
- What are the challenges presented in a rural setting that are less immediate in an urban setting e.g. accessibility, transport, isolation?
- What aspects of Housing First support can reasonably be delivered remotely?



b. Sustaining Homes

Learning And Action Points

Key Takeaways

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

Try it first.

What matters most is different for all of us, and at different times in our lives.

1. Born Ready

The concept, and in some cases assessment, of whether someone is 'housing-ready' runs against evidence and good practice. The starting presumption should be that almost all of us, with the right support, can manage our own home. And that ordinary housing in an ordinary community, for most of us, is the best base to build and live our lives in the way we want to.

Housing First should be the first response for people whose homelessness is made harder by experiences with trauma, addictions, mental health and to redress disadvantage.

Learning And Action Points

Key Takeaways

The professional's role here is to help redress low expectations and to provide current information on the local housing context.

2. Factors that Influence Housing Choice

Choice is central to Housing First and it is important that workers do not make assumptions about people's housing choices. It is equally important to recognise and help redress low expectations that often accompany people experiencing multiple disadvantages.

The Prevention Commission (people with lived and frontline experience of homelessness) designed a simple framework that describes the 8 factors that we all weigh up when deciding our best housing option. What's most important is different for different people, and at different times in their lives:

- **Location.** Being near to family, work, childcare, schools, social networks.
- **Size and type.** Such as number of bedrooms, multi-storey, garden, veranda, concierge.
- **Accessibility.** For wheelchair or other access issues and any other medical factors.
- **Cost.** Rent, council tax, Housing Benefit/LHA, utility costs and in relation to current or future employment.
- **Security of Tenure.** Different tenancies available in the social or private rented sector or occupancy agreements.
- **Safety/security.** Considering issues such as domestic abuse or external abuse or threats affecting wellbeing.
- **Time.** Taking account of how long you can wait to move in and the availability of different housing options.
- **Other factors.** For example, pets, housemates and anything else that someone might identify as important.

Learning And Action Points

Key Takeaways

Housing First support is bespoke and recognises that one size does not fit all.

The connection and rapport between the tenant and support worker is at the heart of Housing First.

Helping to create a positive physical environment at home helps to sustain the tenancy.

Secure additional wrap-around supports for tenants via housing associations and local services.

3. Supporting People

Housing First support is different from other types of housing support because it is built on a series of 7 principles to meet, rather than a list of tasks to deliver (see section 6 for practical examples of meeting these principles).

For many people who have felt excluded from services, the importance of the first and ongoing connection with their Housing First support worker is key. One of the central principles of Housing First is that flexible support is provided for as long as is needed. That the 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 improved. Or more intensive support prior to housing and during periods of transition. Decisions to end support are always led by the tenant and may include 'support holidays' for periods when support is not wanted but may be called on later.

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.

Learning And Action Points

Key Takeaways

4. Making a House a Home

The capacity to make people's house a home in the way they want helps with tenancy sustainment.

- Some furniture and appliance options include furniture packages facilitated by housing providers, bulk purchasing, using local channels and providing personal budgets/ credit cards for tenants. In each case, a consistent budget should prioritise choice and quality. For example, a £1,500 contribution to the costs of furnishing the new tenancy in year one was standard during the Pathfinder.
- Fast-tracking Scottish Welfare Fund payments to support furnishing of new tenancies was enabled as part of a pilot approach in Glasgow, outlined in this report. This could be scoped and developed in other areas. The Scottish Welfare Fund may not provide a sufficient grant to ensure the tenancy is fully furnished and additional financial support may be needed for HF tenants.
- Wheatley Group makes available additional wrap around supports for Housing First tenants, for example money and fuel advice to maximise income, food services, fire safety visits, alarms and other safety features such as fire-retardant bedding.
- Fast tracking Scottish Welfare Fund payments meant people felt at home in their new tenancy more quickly and there are great examples of this locally. A change to the Scottish Welfare Fund guidance would help with allow faster provision of white goods or furniture. 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.

Learning And Action Points

Key Takeaways

Building connections to the local area will help people settle in and start building their lives as part of the community.

Earning and learning provides a mechanism for making local connections.

5. Putting Down Roots

While Housing First can provide the solid foundation for people to build and live their lives, there is still a risk of social isolation.

As people move into their new homes, sometimes into new communities or even alone for the first time, it is important to prepare ahead to prevent the risk of isolation as early as possible.

Here's some considerations:

- The relationship between **housing officers and support staff** is key to work with the tenant to identify preferences, challenge assumptions, and highlight the reality and potential of a new community. A welcome pack with local information and opportunities can help navigate the initial days and weeks.
- Actively **build in community engagement** to support plans and regular contact, for example identifying local groups and forums and supporting tenants to engage and join can help to build early connections in a new area. Speak with tenants who have been in tenancies for longer to find out what helps and what doesn't, and what they wished they'd known earlier.
- Access to **employment and education** should be built into overall service planning. How this looks in reality for each individual will depend on strengths and goals and a clear understanding of the impact, for example on benefits, so this can be weighed up against positive benefit to be gained.

Learning And Action Points

Key Takeaways

Sometimes a different housing outcome needs arranged as an interim or settled option.

Landlord and support services are independent; decisions regarding support do not impact housing security, and changes in housing arrangements do not alter the provision of support.

6. Managing Different Housing Outcomes

There may be times when a tenancy needs managed or maintained on behalf of the tenant, for example:

- When a prison sentence is started due to a conviction before or since the tenancy was allocated.
- When the tenant wants to enter residential rehabilitation to recover from addiction.
- When the tenant is sectioned under the mental health act for a period of time.

During the Pathfinder, these scenarios affected less than 5% of tenants. In all cases, the local authority, housing and support workers should collaborate closely to ensure the tenancy is safe and maintained, that housing benefit is secured where possible or an alternative arrangement agreed. Communication with appropriate agencies (community justice, health and social care) can lead to solutions being found, even if in the short term at first.

There are other occasions when a different housing outcome needs arranged as an interim or settled option, and might include:

- A planned move to another tenancy in another area.
- A planned move to supported or shared accommodation as a settled housing option.
- A 'time out' temporary housing alternative.
- The tenant needs to upsize or downsize property due to a change in personal circumstances.
- An unplanned move – tenant abandons the property, either cutting ties with support or staying connected.
- The tenant makes their own housing arrangements and ends Housing First support, for example buys a house or moves in with a partner.

The offer of support will continue to be made available unless it has been ended by the tenant. And the local authority, housing and support workers should collaborate closely to protect the options of housing and support for as long as needed.

c. Helping Systems Change

Learning And Action Points

Key Takeaways

Scaling up Housing First helps to create more effective local housing systems.

We want to progress toward a timeframe of 6-8 weeks between referral and moving-in date.

Scaling up Housing First helps to create less siloed health and social care responses.

1. Focus on what works

Scaling up Housing First as part of the transition to a Rapid Rehousing approach is a significant change programme for people working on homelessness at a national and local level in Scotland.

Where Housing First has scaled up successfully in cities and countries internationally, it is recognised as playing a pivotal role in improving local housing systems. It does that through:

- The granular and multi-agency focus on local processes and procedures that leads to improvements.
- Reducing repeat and visible homelessness among people experiencing multiple disadvantages.
- The evidenced concepts and values transferring to and influencing other parts of the homelessness system.
- Lending weight to evidence and calls for more social and affordable housing by measuring housing demand in terms of 'homes' and not 'beds' for this cohort.

Developing Housing First can require significant changes to the way systems in your area currently work and overlap. Allocating resource and time to fully understand the landscape and systems in your area can lead to significantly quicker progress and better outcomes for people.

Each area will have a different makeup with many unique and different parts working together in ways that might not be known at first. The variance and flexibility of the service and the most effective structures will be continuously in motion, but it is nonetheless critical to take adequate time to map out the current local picture and to draw up a collectively agreed route map for Housing First in the coming months and years.

Helping systems change will enable progress toward meeting a timeframe of 6-8 weeks between referral and move-in, consistent with international best practice. While the Pathfinder ran behind that, it also demonstrated over time that improvements in pace are possible.

Learning And Action Points

Key Takeaways

Focus on what works

Focus on what works and what matters, and doing more of it, will help to:

- Accelerate the time taken to accommodate people and reduce the time people spend homeless.
- Increase choice and control, including over the location, tenure and type of home someone wants to live in.
- Reduce the need to compromise to fit the 'real-world' context of local housing markets and availability which are different across all parts of the country.
- Enable Housing First to operate effectively across different housing systems and lettings arrangements.
- Help to create less siloed health and social care responses as reported in Hard Edges Scotland.

Learning And Action Points

Key Takeaways

Systems don't change until people do.

It is important to understand and communicate change and each of our roles within it

2. Relationships and Roles

After the relationship between the tenant and Housing First worker, the one that has proved to have significant impact on the development and success of Housing First is the relationship between housing and support staff.

While the principles of Housing First ensure that housing and support are independent of one another, this only means that, for a tenant, one does not depend on the other. It is important that housing and support staff take care and time to build good relationships with tenants, but also crucially with each other.

When helping systems to change, it is important to understand and communicate change and each of our roles within it – and hold those relationships carefully.

Learning And Action Points

Key Takeaways

Review your end-to-end process and shorten it. Can you shorten it again?

3. Personal Journeys

End-to-end process:

engage > support > assess > allocate housing > move in > settle in

Many people lack trust in services and all routes into Housing First should prioritise the building of trust. Housing First creates an opportunity to build fit-for-purpose assessment and referral processes that don't replicate old ways that didn't work for people. Here's some considerations:

- People have often repeatedly attempted to complete the process to settled housing without success; experiencing assessment and referral processes that are not flexible or sensitive enough and ultimately further exclude. Replicating more traditional assessment and referral processes will too often create additional barriers, making it even more difficult to get to the right people.
- Setting out an end-to-end process from the point somebody is referred to Housing First all the way to the point that person is housed sounds straightforward. In reality it is a process built on a series of moving parts where responsibility for each lies with partners in different sectors, operating under a different set of constraints.
- Think carefully about assessment and referral procedures to ensure they are very easy to access, have multiple routes in, don't work to restrictive timescales and don't see referrals closed due to not all information being provided or missed appointments.
- Invite an external and independent party to review the end-to-end process periodically. Ensure this includes people with experience of the process. This can help all partners identify operational improvements that will serve to ensure that people get a faster and more sustainable housing outcome.
- 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.

Section 7

Scaling Housing First: Five Keys to National Success



a. Local Need

The in-depth analysis carried out as part of the Hard Edges Scotland research provides strong pointers on the scale of Housing First that is 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 benefit most from a Housing First response over the next 10-years.

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**

The table shows that while highest levels of severe and multiple disadvantage is found in **urban** areas experiencing poverty and deprivation, a national approach tailored to local and **rural** needs across all local authorities is needed.

This demand estimate is a robust and important marker on **scale**. However, local areas need to set their own markers on **pace** – taking account of the factors that will influence how fast Housing First can scale up across their local authority area, as outlined below.

b. The SCALE Framework: Five Keys to National Success

This section presents the SCALE framework – Supply Homes, Coordinate Support, Adapt Funding, Lock-in Learning, Ensure Equality – five keys to unlock Housing First across Scotland.

Housing First raises the bar for people facing the toughest challenges, transforming lives and communities. By rapidly expanding social housing, redressing deep exclusion through a 'support passport,' pooling flexible resources and nurturing learning, Scotland will deliver on its commitment to people who can benefit most from Housing First.

Drawing on global successes, from Finland's near elimination of rough sleeping to Canada's coordinated systems, SCALE positions Scotland to achieve more impact over the next phase.

Method for measuring progress in Scotland:

The Rapid Rehousing and Housing First Annual Check-up provides the primary source of qualitative evidence for measuring progress against the SCALE framework. This is considered together with Scottish Government's Housing First data and other current and relevant data as referenced below. The indicators draw from the Ending Homelessness Together Monitor, narrowed to those that can prioritise better outcomes for people experiencing severe and multiple disadvantages.

Key to Scale

Progress

- **Not Started**
- **Early Progress:** Initial steps taken, but significant work remains.
- **Moderate Progress:** Noticeable advancements have been made; roughly halfway to completion.
- **Advanced Progress:** Most of the work is complete; nearing the goal with only minor tasks or refinements left.
- **Achieved**

Direction

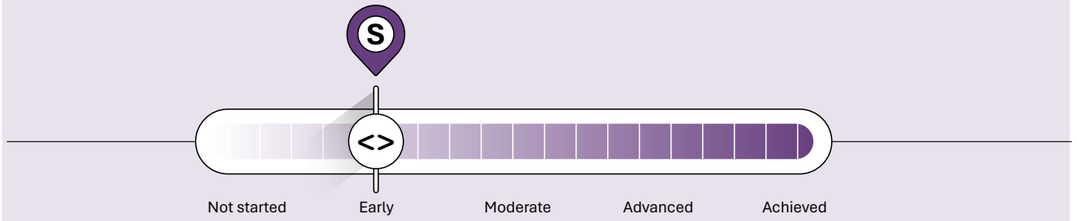
Same or stalled <>

Getting better ∧

Getting worse ∨

Supply Homes

Rapidly expand social housing to meet demand, removing barriers to settled tenancies for people with severe and multiple disadvantages.



Housing First's transformative promise – rapid, settled housing with tailored support to address deep disadvantage – hinges on one non-negotiable fact: access to housing. We can look at Finland's success of reducing long-term homelessness by over 70% since 2008, dependent on the acquisition of thousands of homes for Housing First and proving that a robust and targeted supply of housing is the cornerstone of Housing First.

What will deliver this?

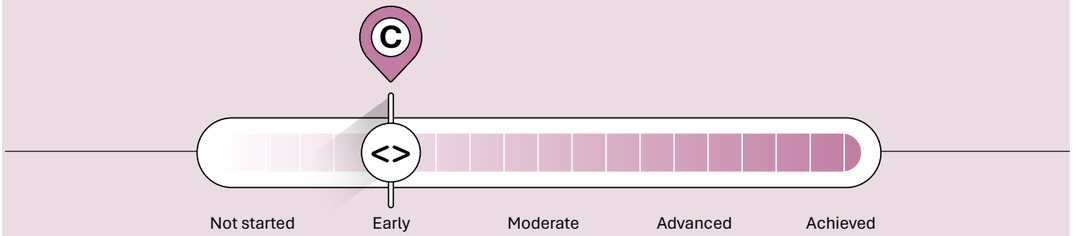
Scottish Government increasing investment in social housing and the pace and scale of it being delivered. Local authority landlords, housing associations and cooperatives increasing homes for Housing First directly through the national Affordable Housing Supply Programme (AHSP) and acquisition programme – with the potential for social investment to make a small contribution too. Housing providers removing barriers to Housing First by delivering an inclusive allocations policy and loosening restrictive eligibility criteria or deposit requirements.

How will we measure success?

- Fewer people are sleeping rough or staying in unsuitable temporary accommodation.
- Scottish Government sets an allocation target for Housing First, with more councils and registered social landlords committing to it.
- Scottish Government invests in a social investment programme as one mechanism to scale up Housing First.

Coordinate Support

Position Housing First workers as convenors, acting as a 'support passport' that wraps housing, health, social care and justice services around people.



Housing First works by redressing the extraordinary set of challenges and disadvantages that people have faced in their lives. By combining ordinary housing with extraordinary support, it also delivers a direct message to people that they are valued and they belong. We need Housing First workers recognised as central convenors who act as a 'support passport' to seamlessly wrap housing, health, social care and justice services around each person. These workers, often forging the strongest, most trusted relationships due to their highly skilled approach and lower caseloads, are uniquely equipped to advocate for people and the tailored services they need.

What will deliver this?

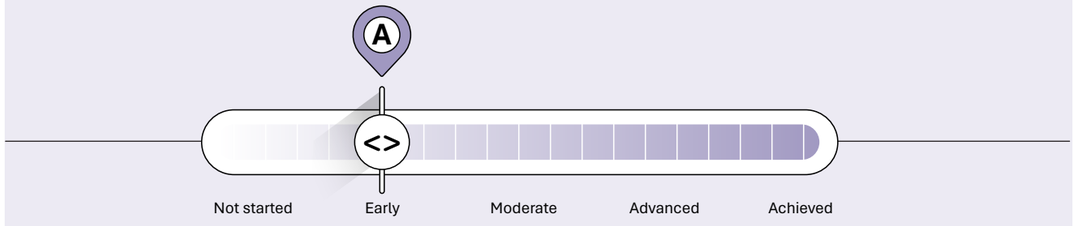
Enabling and authorising Housing First workers to call on multidisciplinary teams and eliminate bureaucratic delays to prioritise the lives of people outlined in the Hard Edges Scotland research. Housing First workers are located within councils, health and social care partnerships and third sector organisations, which should have no weighting on their ability to gather the vital services people need. The new duty in the Housing Bill for councils to undertake an assessment of support needs in their area provides the ideal opportunity to position the pivotal Housing First convenor role.

How will we measure success?

- More Housing First providers reporting improved pathways for Housing First tenants to access the range of specialist and tailored support they need.
- More areas facilitating multi-disciplinary panels to discuss cases and identify potential Housing First tenants
- Housing First featured within Local Outcome Improvement Plans, Local Housing Strategies, Integrated Joint Board's Strategic Plan for Health & Social Care, including the Housing Contribution Statement.

Adapt Funding

Implement flexible, shared funding models across sectors to pool resources and sustain and scale Housing First without silos or gaps.



Housing First reaps cross-sector benefits. The Annual Check-up returns examples of Housing First interventions leading to less ambulance callouts, thereby lessening pressure on the NHS. And of Housing First creating the conditions that prevent repeat offending, thereby lessening the pressure on the justice and prison systems. However the cost of Housing First is largely being met by Scottish Government and council's housing and homelessness teams, with just a small number of cases where health and social care partnerships (HSCP) or alcohol and drug partnerships (ADPs) have part-commissioned Housing First services in their area. Scottish Government has provided seven 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. Housing First needs a sustainable footing and funding to enable it to meet its transformative impact on the lives of people experience severe and multiple disadvantages across Scotland.

What will deliver this?

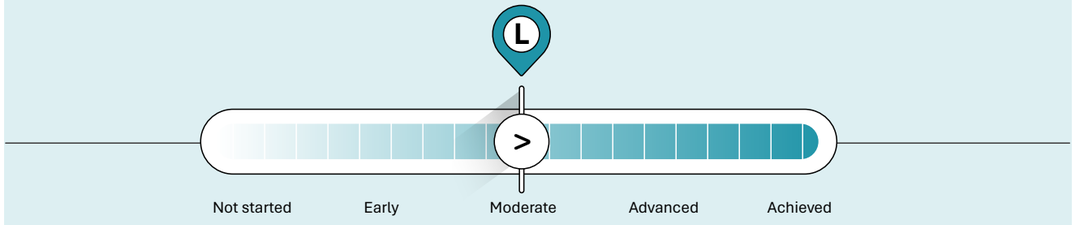
Long-term funding commitments for Rapid Rehousing, including Housing First, to be established in collaboration between Scottish Government, local authorities, HSCPs, ADPs and other local partners. Constructive dialogue, exploring flexible funding mechanisms, shared accountability frameworks, or innovative 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.

How will we measure success?

- A new funding framework for Housing First for the next phase of scaling up, agreed at a national and local level.

Lock-in Learning

Nurture a culture of shared learning across sectors, using insights from practice to refine and strengthen Housing First outcomes.



Environments to learn, reflect and exchange real-world insights help to create a more enduring Housing First programme. Shared learning advances frontline practice and enables support providers to adapt to local context and challenges. In turn, this enhances trust and builds relationships, helping to ensure services are responsive and tailored to diverse needs. Leading with learning also means creating the opportunity to review and influence wider policy and spend, including the five keys outlined in this SCALE framework.

What will deliver this?

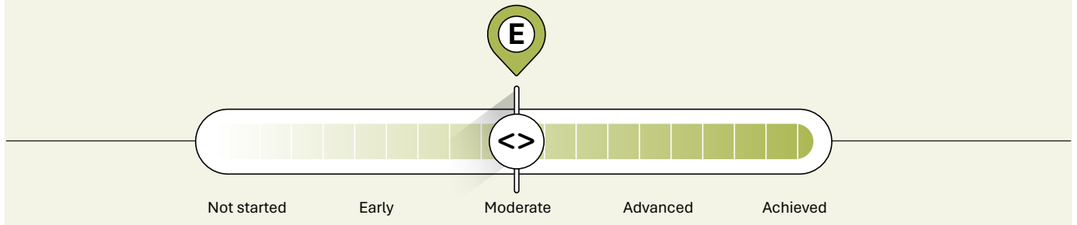
Partners in Scotland can now draw on 3 years' shared experience of the Housing First Check-up process, which combines a self-reflection process against key measures, feedback from tenants, and a 'safe space' sounding board for local authority leads to explore progress and aspirations with external, including international, Housing First experts. Key takeaways from this process to date include that local authority colleagues find useful the space created by the sounding board approach and the full focus on their area alone; while common scaling and delivery issues across authorities are a key pattern, many of which extend into the scope of broader Rapid Rehousing and housing strategy considerations. A natural evolution would expand the focus of the local Housing First sounding boards to a broader and preventative rapid rehousing reflection. Meantime, a training gap on Housing First for providers and commissioners has opened and a solution will be implemented over the next phase.

How will we measure success?

- The development of national attributes and local measures for Rapid Rehousing and Housing First.
- Development and delivery of a Housing First training programme for providers and commissioners of Housing First services in Scotland.

Ensure Equality

Fast-track access to housing and support for groups facing systemic disadvantage and exclusion



Scotland's housing emergency threatens to deepen exclusion, leaving more people trapped in rough sleeping or unsuitable and unsafe temporary accommodation; environments that erode opportunities and entrench disadvantage among lives already marked by extraordinary challenges and compounded by intersectional inequalities like poverty, race, gender and disability. Housing First is not about prioritising some people or giving preferential treatment; instead it is about ensuring equitable access to essential services for people facing severe and multiple disadvantages. This is the responsibility of government at all levels, and the central social purpose of third sector organisations in the homelessness sector too.

What will deliver this?

Housing First is primarily a response to poor health created by inequality and the preventative nature of the approach would also be helped by a stronger public health focus. More targeting of Housing First for groups disproportionately affected by systemic disadvantage and exclusion, such as minority ethnic, people with disabilities, women escaping domestic abuse alongside complex needs like mental health, trauma or addiction challenges

How will we know when this has been achieved?

- Closing the gap for groups disproportionately affected by homelessness.
- Fewer households experiencing poverty before and after housing costs.
- Fewer people sleeping rough and in unsuitable temporary accommodation.
- More people access trauma-informed services.
- Greater awareness of people-first language and how people identify and express themselves.

Appendices

Appendix 1

Acronyms

ADP	Alcohol and Drug Partnership
AHSP	Affordable Housing Supply Programme
ALACHO	Association of Local Authority Chief Housing Officers
CIH	Chartered Institute for Housing
COSLA	Convention of Scottish Local Authorities
DHP	Discretionary Housing Payment
DWP	Department for Work and Pensions
EHT	Ending Homelessness Together
FEANTSA	European Federation of National Organisations Working with the Homeless
HARSAG	Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Action Group
HL1	Statutory Homelessness Monitoring
HNDA	Housing Needs Demand Assessment
HSCP	Health and Social Care Partnership
IJB	Integrated Joint Board
LGBTQ	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer/Questioning
LHS	Local Housing Strategy
NCS	National Care Service
RRTP	Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan
RSL	Registered Social Landlord
SFHA	Scottish Federation of Housing Associations
SHIP	Strategic Housing Investment Plan
VAWG	Violence Against Women and Girls

Appendix 2

Housing First Outcome Indicators

In order to measure the impact of Housing First and to ensure it can be regularly reviewed and refined, it is important to build evaluation from the beginning.

Below is a summary of the outcome areas that were assessed as part of the evaluation undertaken by the Housing First Pathfinder. Most of the questions asked offer a detailed list or scale so that each person completing the form can answer in a way that best represents them at that time. Many of these are validated questions that are widely used in research and evaluation.

For copies of the data collection tools and guidance used in the Pathfinder evaluation please contact housingfirst@homelessnetwork.scot who will be happy to pass these on with permission of the research team and evaluation funders.

Demographic Details

- Age
- Gender
- Ethnicity
- Nationality
- Sexual identity

Housing and Neighbourhood Satisfaction

- Current/recent housing status
- Duration of homelessness during lifetime

Health and Wellbeing

- Physical health status
- Physical health problems or disabilities
- Mental health/wellbeing status
- Mental health problems
- Alcohol use and dependence
- Illegal drug or misused prescription medication use and dependence
- Use of prescription medication

Social Support and Community Integration

- Satisfaction with friendships and relationships
- Community integration / social inclusion / social connectedness

Economic status, financial wellbeing and activity

- Income sources
- Welfare benefits received
- How well coping financially
- Participation in education, training, paid or voluntary work
- Satisfaction with how time is spent

Experience of crime/antisocial behaviour

- Experiences of crime as victim and/or perpetrator
- Experiences of anti-social behaviour as victim and/or perpetrator
- Interactions with criminal justice system

Service use

- Use of health and other support services

Goals and Achievements

- Main goals and achievements

Appendix 3

Housing First FAQs

Housing First is a highly personalised approach that ends people's homelessness with housing rapidly. It also assigns a highly trained support worker to get alongside the new tenant to make settling into their new home easier.

Q. Who is Housing First for?

Housing First is the first response for people whose homelessness is experienced alongside other severe and multiple disadvantage. While everyone's experiences will be different the common threads include trauma, abuse, addictions, mental health problems and experience of local authority care and prison.

Q. How are tenancies allocated for Housing First?

A. Tenancies used for Housing First are general needs mainstream tenancies and are allocated in line with landlord's existing allocations policies. Housing First is currently operating successfully in a range of allocations settings including Points Based Allocations systems, Choice Based Lettings and Common Housing Registers. Some landlords may decide to create a specific process or protocol within their own allocations policy for Housing First, but this will be based on local context. It is hoped that landlords will work closely with local partners to identify any changes to allocations policy that might be identified.

Q. What kind of tenancy do Housing First tenants have?

A. Housing First tenancy in the social rented sector is a Scottish Secure Tenancy with all the same protections, conditions and security as any mainstream tenancy. Some people may be accommodated with a Private Residential Tenancy in the private rented sector. In the normal way, tenancies will be available for as long as someone wants to live there.

Q. How are people matched with tenancies?

A. Local authorities, alongside support providers, are encouraged to develop 'by-name' lists of people in their area that have needs beyond housing and whose experience of homelessness may be long-term and/or repeating. This is in line with Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Action Group (2018) recommendations and the Scottish Government/ COSLA High Level Action Plan.

As well as area 'by-name' lists, straightforward referral processes are developed to enable people to refer and self-refer into Housing First. Choice is a key principle for Housing First. Local partners work closely with individuals to realistically identify the location and characteristics of a property that they could make a home.

Q. What about tenancy-readiness?

A. Housing First works in a new environment which understands that most of us, with the right support, can manage our own home. The means removing ideas of 'tenancy-readiness' and giving people a chance in their own place.

Q. Do tenants have to accept Housing First support?

A. No, the tenancy is not conditional on someone engaging with Housing First support. Support providers work to the principles of active engagement and respectful persistence and cases remain open even when engagement is low. Local partners actively seek to identify what support looks like to an individual and what/ how they are willing to accept.

In reality, most tenants engage with support in a personalised way and the removal of conditionality and focus on choice and control enables people to find what is of most value to them as they settle into their new home. There is no pre-existing support plan for people to follow or set number of hours of support to fulfill. Best-practice maximum caseload of seven tenants per support worker at any one time; this is a key factor in the success of Housing First.

Q. Does Housing First work?

A. There is an overwhelming body of international evidence (including now in Scotland) showing that, with close fidelity to the Housing First principles, the approach delivers:

- 80% – 90% housing retention rates after two years
- improving health outcomes
- decreasing involvement in criminal activity and anti-social behaviour
- improved cost-effectiveness of service delivery and cost savings

Q. What if the Housing First tenancy isn't working?

A. Like any tenancy, there are a number of factors that contribute to its success. If the landlord and the support provider have concerns about the sustainability of the tenancy, landlords can make use of existing policies and procedures such as Management Transfers and local nomination agreements to secure a tenancy in an alternative location. The landlord retains the right to end the tenancy in line with their existing policies and procedures and legal obligations. These instances are very rare, and the principles of Housing First ensure that the person will continue to be supported and rehoused.

Q. What effect does Housing First have on housing waiting lists?

A. The people housed through Housing First are not 'new' people being added to existing housing demand. They have always been there with a right to a home, but often without equal opportunity. Housing First provides a mechanism for ensuring everyone can quickly access a home and the support they need.

Many people have struggled to maintain accommodation and have repeatedly accessed different accommodation routes and services. Housing First has been proven to help people maintain tenancies and access appropriate services. This should have a positive impact and free up capacity and time for services.

Q. What about supported housing and hostels?

A. Where Housing First is not the best solution, or mainstream housing isn't wanted, then the size and quality of shared, supported accommodation is key. Overarching Rapid Rehousing Transition Plans will progress toward smaller, specialist units within a psychologically informed environment. Local Health and Social Care Partnerships will also consider whether those units continue to be part of their local homelessness response, or whether the specialist nature aligns them with broader health and social care strategy and commissioning frameworks. Read more in the 2024 report from the Scottish Government's Supported Housing Task and Finish Group.

Q. What is Housing First Scotland?

A. Housing First Scotland belongs to everyone who is helping Housing First become the first response for people whose homelessness is made harder by experiences with trauma, addictions and mental health. It is hosted by Homeless Network Scotland and funded by the Scottish Government.

Q. Will Housing First end homelessness in Scotland?

A. Not on its own, as most people who become homeless have no or low support needs beyond their need for housing. However, any attempt to end homelessness that does not include Housing First will not work for the population in Scotland who are affected by personal, social and economic disadvantage.

Homeless
Network
Scotland
we are all in

Homeless Network Scotland is a registered charity and company limited by guarantee.
Charity registered in Scotland SCO03453. Company registered in Scotland SC112361

Registered office: Unit 16a, Adelphi Centre, 12 Commercial Road, Glasgow G5 0PQ
0141 420 7272 | www.homelessnetwork.scot| hello@homelessnetwork.scot | @homelessnetscot