



What you need to know: an update on Housing First

Background

The [Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Action Group](#) (HARSAG) made a total of 70 recommendations to the Scottish Government, all of which were accepted in principle. The Scottish Government has now set out how it will work with local Government and the third sector to implement the recommendations through the [Ending homelessness and rough sleeping action plan](#).

The default position for homeless households with low or no support needs should be rapid rehousing. That means limiting the time spent in any form of temporary accommodation as far as possible. Where temporary accommodation is required, it should be furnished, mainstream accommodation and the number of moves before a permanent tenancy is offered should be minimized.

For households with high support needs, whose experience of homelessness is compounded by other challenges such as early years trauma, domestic abuse, addiction and time in care or prison, Housing First should be offered.

Housing First is more than housing, it involves providing intensive support for as long as it is required and with no conditions attached. You can find out more about the principles and how Housing First is working across the UK and Ireland in this [CIH publication](#).

Rapid Rehousing Transition Plans

All local authorities have now developed a five-year Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan for their area.

Included in each local authority's plan is a commitment to develop a Housing First approach for those with some of the most acute needs. The guidance and tools developed to help draft the plans is available through [Glasgow Homelessness Network](#) (GHN).

Housing First Pathfinders

Social Bite and the Merchant House of Glasgow established a £3.2 million fund to support Housing First projects across Scotland. The money will fund the support needed for Housing First over two years. Funds are being administered by the Corra Foundation and

details of the projects that have already been established are [available online](#). This money has been complemented with £21m from the Scottish Government to support the transition to rapid rehousing and Housing First. In an initial phase, five Pathfinder Areas have been established and are all delivering Housing First projects. These are:

- Aberdeen/shire
- Dundee
- Edinburgh
- Glasgow
- Stirling

More than 800 homes have been pledged in those five areas mostly in the social rented sector, but with some private rented tenancies too. Support for people is delivered by local consortia including support providers.

Challenges

CIH Scotland welcome the ambition to end homelessness and the move towards rapid rehousing and Housing First. However, we have raised a number of concerns about how the principles will work in practice. The housing sector needs:

- an adequate supply of suitable, affordable homes to move people out of temporary accommodation quickly;
- guaranteed long term funding to be made available to cover support costs. While funding through third sector organisations such as Social Bite is very welcome, it may not be sustainable;
- clarity on how to maintain choice and balance the needs of homeless households with others in housing need;
- support from all partners including local authorities, RSLs, health and social care and the third sector; and
- support for staff to adapt to new ways of working.

Progress to Date

Progress in the five Pathfinder areas is being monitored and reported monthly by GHN. The number of new Housing First tenancies started during May 2019 was 16, bringing the total for the Pathfinder programme to 86.



For tenancies beginning in May 2019 the average length of time before moving in was 81 days and the average time for the programme to date is 69 days.

The number of tenancies sustained so far is 85-99% of the total tenancies started. One tenancy ended because of a planned move to protect the person's safety. No tenancies have ended so far as a result of eviction or abandonment.

Details of the Pathfinder progress reports are available on [GHN's website](#).

Frequently Asked Questions

Who is Housing First For? It is for those whose homelessness is compounded with other severe and multiple disadvantages. This includes trauma, abuse, addiction and mental ill health. It is estimated this affects around 5,700 people in Scotland.

How are tenancies allocated? Landlords use a mix of allocation systems including points based, choice based and common housing registers. Some may develop a specific Housing First protocol based on local context. Currently landlords are developing lists of people who meet the criteria but over time it is expected self-referral pathways will be developed. Where HF is not appropriate then prospective tenants will be directed to the rapid rehousing solution.

What kind of tenancy do Housing First tenants have? A Housing First tenancy in the social sector is a Scottish Secure Tenancy with all the same rights and protections as a mainstream tenancy. Tenancies are available for as long as someone wants to live there.

Do tenants have to accept support? No. The tenancy is not conditional on someone receiving support. There is no pre-set support plan for tenants to follow or hours to fulfil. However, support providers will seek to engage in a personalized way, even when engagement is low.

How many cases should a support worker manage? We suggest using the 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.

Does Housing First work? Yes. International evidence shows that the approach delivers:

- 80%-90% tenancy retention rates after two years.
- Improved health outcomes.
- Decreased crime and ASB.
- Cost effectiveness.

What if the tenancy breaks down? Like any tenancy, a number of factors contribute to its success. Landlords retain the right to end the

Top tips for housing professionals

Housing First has been successfully delivered in Glasgow since the first pilot project was established in 2010. Subsequent projects and the five Pathfinder areas have been developing Housing First tailored to local needs and circumstances.

While local authorities will have to take different approaches depending on the local housing market, availability and their approach to allocations, some common challenges have emerged and top tips that will be useful for all social landlords include:

- ✓ **Carry out regular Housing First training and awareness raising for all staff.** This will build positive working relationships and ensure that when teams change knowledge is not lost
- ✓ **Arrange regular updates between housing and support staff.** This will ensure everyone feels part of the same team and will encourage more collaborative working.
- ✓ **Make Housing First support staff your first port of call to anticipate potential problems.** Their relationship with tenants can be untiled to find solutions.
- ✓ **Review data sharing protocols** to ensure consent is in place and communication between housing and support staff is as easy as possible.

tenancy in line with their existing policies and obligations. However, these instances should be rare and regardless the principles will ensure the tenant will be rehoused and supported

What impact does it have on waiting lists?

None. The people housed by Housing First are not 'new'. They have always had a right to a home but often without equal opportunity. Housing First gives them an opportunity to access a home and the support they need.



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What else do I need to know?

CIH Scotland and the Glasgow Homeless Network recently produced [guidance for housing professionals on Housing First](#). This manual sets out everything practitioners need to start implementing a new approach to housing those who are homeless and have complex needs.

If you need any more information, please get in touch:

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