



A Home For Everyone

Manifesto Briefing:
Housing First

Policy Briefing: Delivering Housing First to everyone who needs it.

“Gives that choice, gives that freedom and gives that safety so that **when all of your basic needs are met**, you can actually start to think about **what is it that I want in life**, you know, what kind of people do I want in my life? How do I feel in my mental and physical self, and **what kind of changes do I want to make**? Whereas when you’re on the street or in a hostel, it’s most of the time just survival.”ⁱ

– Housing First support worker

What is Housing First?

The trauma of long-term homelessness, poverty and social exclusion means there is a small but significant cohort of people whose needs consistently go unmet by traditional homelessness services. These individuals typically have significantly worse physical and mental health compared to not only the general public but also other people experiencing homelessness. Their lives are often marked by cycles of rough sleeping, temporary accommodation, prison stays and hospital admissions, all while their health and social care needs worsen.ⁱ For these individuals, Housing First support can help break the cycle of repeat homelessness, acting as a transformative and often lifesaving intervention.ⁱⁱ

The strong base of evidence for success in Housing First has seen it adopted widely across the USA, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France and Scotland. In England, the programme has grown in popularity since 2010, with projects across the country. It is increasingly recognised as a crucial and cost-effective way to end repeat homelessness, reduce offending behaviour and improve health needs where other services have been ineffective in doing so.

Housing First is both a philosophy and a service model. The housing first philosophy understands that everyone has a right to a home. The Housing First model is a distinct service design in which people with multiple, intersecting support needs are provided a secure tenancy and wrap-around support with fidelity to the [seven principles of Housing First](#).

The Seven Principles of Housing First:

¹ All block quotes from Abdul Aziz, S. and Boobis, S. (2024).
Housing First: Policy briefing

Homeless Link



Benefits of Housing First

"The help just wasn't there back then, they put you in a hostel, then move you to another hostel, because my lifestyle was manic then, I was addicted to drugs, I haven't taken them for 5 years now with Housing First, that's when I first started to stop and change my life."

- Housing First resident

In 2017, Government made a ground-breaking £28 million investmentⁱⁱⁱ to establish three scaled regional Housing First pilots in Liverpool, the West Midlands and Greater Manchester. Outcomes from these pilots show their effectiveness in ending homelessness for people with high support needs. DLUHC's third pilot evaluation report shows a 78% tenancy sustainment rate^{iv} – far surpassing sustainment rates of other support models and proving the effectiveness of Housing First.

Access to Housing First can act as a significant step in treatment for those experiencing long-term social exclusion. Housing First targets support to those stuck in repeating cycles of homelessness, often spanning years or decades. These individuals often require an intensive level of support for a variety of needs that traditional homelessness services do not meet. Growing evidence both across England and internationally shows that people from this cohort who are supported through Housing First are significantly more likely to stabilise and improve outcomes across health, offending and substance use than those without the support of the programme. Housing First should therefore be seen as a critical tenet of a cross-departmental approach to not only ending homelessness but tackling health and social care needs. This means financial and strategic investment from across Government that reflects the varied benefits it delivers.

While Housing First has been delivered primarily within the homelessness sector in England, its origins are as a health and social care intervention.^v Its benefits as a healthcare intervention are significant: the programme is targeted at those whose health is severely compromised by long histories of multiple disadvantage, and support often results in improved engagement with routine healthcare, improvements to mental health and stabilisation and reduction of substance use.^{viii} Research from Homeless Link shows 39% of residents report improved physical health after three years, as well as significantly reduced A&E use and hospital admission.^{viii} The same study found 55% of residents showed improved mental health after working with Housing First for three years, alongside an 18% drop in safeguarding concerns across the same period.^{ix}

“Things are working out for me on a personal basis quite well at the moment, you know, mental health support [...] I’m in the right frame of mind, and the support helps me stay in that positive frame of mind.”

– Housing First resident

Evidence also shows that Housing First improves outcomes in criminal justice and in some cases significantly reduces criminal activity.^x Research shows a 40% drop in offending behaviour across three years of the project and an associated reduction in contact with the justice system.^{xi} Residents report feeling motivated to engage in positive activities and avoid jeopardising their tenancies. Similarly, residents show significantly reduced levels of anti-social behaviour, which continue to reduce the longer they are supported through the programme.

Perhaps most importantly, Housing First shows people with histories of complex trauma and instability building a sense of home, agency and self-worth. Research from Homeless Link shows that only 9% of Housing First residents said they had hobbies or interests at the point of entry – and that this jumped to 37% after 3 years of engagement.^{xii} During this same period, the number of people reporting positive social networks more than doubled. A different research paper found that rates of begging dropped from 71% to 51%.^{xiii} The recovery effect of Housing First goes well beyond just physical recovery – with residents showing emotional recovery, increased resilience and an improved quality of life, accessible because of the support of the scheme.

“I found better ways to entertain myself now. Go out clubbing, football a lot nowadays. I actually have reasons to not want to get locked up. Well, before I had nothing to stop me [...] if I got locked up, because my life was already at the bottom of the heap. Well, now I’ve come so far that if I was so get locked up again, I’d have to come and start from the bottom again. And nobody got time for that.”

– Housing First resident

As evidenced, the benefits of Housing First are spread across Government departments, and CSJ estimate that every £1 invested in Housing First delivers £1.56 in savings across health, criminal justice and the homelessness system.^{xiv} Cross-departmental commissioning would strengthen and share the financial benefits of Housing First, recognising the significant role it can play in reducing pressure on public services by providing sustained support to those experiencing multiple disadvantage.

Housing First works: both as an effective approach to reducing homelessness and improving health and social care outcomes but also as a cost effective intervention to reduce pressures on housing, health, social care, and criminal justice services. If we don’t commit to investing in Housing First as a well-evidenced and effective solution, we will fail to address the needs of some of the most disadvantage people in our society while neglecting to address the pressure that sustained homelessness places on other public services.

Delivering Housing First at scale

“It’s a massive improvement and I’ve seen how many people it’s affected and how it’s changed things. Just the whole the whole philosophy with housing you give them home first and then you work on all the others here. And yeah it won’t work for everyone but I guarantee most people like me that want that chance you know, it will work for them.”

– Housing First resident

Homeless Link

Research estimates that at least 16,450 people with the most intensive support needs across England would benefit from Housing First.^{xv} Estimates from 2021 suggest delivering Housing First at scale would require £150.3 million per annum.^{xvi} As the approach has attracted the support of commissioners and providers the number of Housing First projects has grown remarkably across recent years, from 32 in 2017 to around 140 today. However, as the majority of these are small projects Housing First capacity remains a fraction of what is needed. We know that in 2020 approximately 1,995 people across England were being supported through Housing First, less than 15% of the number in need.^{xvii}

Even where Government have invested in Housing First, the funding environment means the programme faces an uncertain future. While significant investment has been made into the pilots through dedicated Housing First funding, this is set to integrate into general Rough Sleeping Initiative (RSI) funding from April 2024, meaning services will face a higher level of financial risk as investment is left to the discretion of local authorities. Outside of the pilots Housing First projects are funded through a variety of insecure funding sources, most commonly RSI. In turn, RSI funding faces a 2025 cliff edge, and the lack of a long-term plan places the future of Housing First at risk. Despite the enormous benefits that Housing First delivers to the justice system or health and social care, very few projects receive funding from these sources.^{xviii} A dedicated, multi-year, cross-departmental Housing First programme must be integrated into a national homelessness strategy, with commitment to roll the programme out at scale across the country for everyone who needs it.

“Because I spent a long time on the streets, so I have got some trauma. It took me a year to go into a room. I have a bed on the floor, I sleep on the floor because that is how I was sleeping. I don’t really sleep at night.”

– Housing First resident

Challenges in delivering Housing First in England

“Housing First is meant to be open-ended. But we know with how our funding system works, that’s not possible for us to promise. So we do also have a responsibility to get them in a place where everything’s not going to crumble when we walk away”

– Housing First support worker

Evidence shows that the amazing outcomes of Housing First projects come when they are delivered with high fidelity to the core Housing First principles.^{xix} Pressures including funding practices and constraints in housing supply frequently undermine these principles despite the efforts of providers. The success of a national Housing First programme therefore relies in part on reforms to the housing and homelessness system more broadly.

While Housing First embeds long-term, open ended support as a key principle, short-term funding windows mean many projects across England are unable to guarantee support more than a year or two in advance.^{xx} Similarly, existing funding often comes with unrealistic expectations in terms of staffing, caseloads, outcomes and throughput that fail to take into account the intensity of support that people who have experienced complex trauma can require. Providers delivering Housing First talk about inappropriate targets, constraints and expectations from funders and commissioners which can undermine the services’ fidelity to core Housing First principles. In some cases, this has led demonstrably successful services to be decommissioned.

National constraints on affordable and social housing supply also threatens the success of Housing First in England. Ability to source suitable housing is the most cited challenge for Housing First providers; the supply of suitable one-bedroom accommodation is limited, and what stock exists may not meet the needs of residents, undermining the ability to deliver choice and control. Learning from the pilots has shown how

scaled delivery can be adapted to housing market constraints, but providers tell us that for the programme to succeed long-term it must be delivered alongside an associated programme of social housebuilding.

The wider role of Housing First

As well as a highly effective rough sleeping intervention, Housing First has been shown to work for other groups whose homelessness may be insufficiently supported by traditional support services. In recognition of their different patterns of homelessness and underrepresentation in mixed homelessness settings, several successful Housing First projects have been established to focus on supporting women. While these services follow the same core principles, they are often delivered in conjunction with specialist women's providers and place more emphasis on support around abuse or exploitation. Specialist women's Housing First provisions have consistently reported impressive tenancy sustainment and wellbeing improvement outcomes, often with residents who had previously been considered extremely vulnerable or hard to reach.^{xxi}

International evidence also makes the case for specialist programmes of Housing First for young people. This adapted model, known as Housing First for Youth (HF4Y),^{xxii} focuses on relationship-based recovery models that support young people to develop autonomy in their transition to adulthood. The HF4Y model requires higher levels of flexibility in housing options, a higher level of support in positive risk taking, and a stronger focus on tenancy management skills and independence.^{xxiii} HF4Y projects are also likely to take young people on at earlier stages of homelessness, seeking to prevent homelessness from occurring at all or ensure young people are housed as quickly as possible.

Both HF4Y and dedicated women's Housing First services are limited in England currently. Scaled Housing First should retain scope for specialist providers to support in designing and delivering Housing First for women and young people building on the success of other projects across the United Kingdom to deliver effective, gender-informed and youth specific support at a national scale.

Recommendations

Building on the existing Housing First pilot delivery, commit to deliver a full-scale rollout of a minimum 16,450 Housing First spaces across England:

- Embed the development and delivery of a national Housing First programme as a key priority of a new cross-Government Ending Homelessness task force with cross-department accountability.
- Allocate the estimated £150.3 million per annum required to fund Housing First at scale, committed until the end of next Parliament.
- Deliver funds to communities based on estimated level of need, with flexibility to adapt provisions to meet individual needs, following learning from the large-scale regional pilots.
- Through investment in one-bed homes for social rent, ensure the programme is accompanied by a supply of truly affordable housing to meet the scale of need.
- Commit to explore the applicability of Housing First for Youth, including national research to scope the scale of need and funding for a programme of pilots.

Ensure any strategies and pledges embed fidelity to the core Housing First principles.:

- Install a Housing First Programme Director to work collaboratively with specialists to oversee the rollout of a national Housing First programme and ensure its fidelity over time.

- Implement a national Fidelity Framework for Housing First projects to ensure the core Housing First principles are retained at all stages of delivery.
- As part of wider Housing First rollout funding, commission a package of training for professionals focused on the principles of Housing First and delivering services in line with the Fidelity Framework.

ⁱ Abdul Aziz, S and Boobis, S (2024) *More Than a Roof: Exploring the holistic outcomes of Housing First*. Homeless Link.

ⁱⁱ Making Every Adult Matter (2021). *Building on Success: A strategy for the MEAM coalition 2021-2025*.

ⁱⁱⁱ HM Treasury (2017). *Autumn Budget 2017*. 22nd November 2017.

^{iv} DLUHC (2022). *Evaluation of the Housing First Pilots: Third Process Report*. September 2022.

^v Pleace, N. (2016). *Housing First Guide Europe*. FEANTSA.

^{vi} Bretherton, J. and Pleace, N. (2015). *Housing First in England: An Evaluation of Nine Services*. University of York; Baxter, A., Tweed, E., Katikireddi, S.V. and Thomson, H. (2019). *Effects of Housing First Approaches on Health and Wellbeing of Adults who are Homeless or at Risk of Homelessness: Systemic Review and Meta-Analysis of Randomised Control Trials*. Journal of Epidemiol Community Health.

^{vii} Ibid.

^{viii} Abdul Aziz, S and Boobis, S (2024) *More Than A Roof: Exploring the holistic outcomes of Housing First*. Homeless Link.

^{ix} Ibid.

^x Bretheron, J. and Pleace, N. (2015) *Housing First in England: An Evaluation of Nine Services*. University of York; Quilgars, D. and Pleace, N. (2017). *The Threshold Housing First Pilot for Women with an Offending History: The First Two Years*. University of York; Pleace, N. and Quilgars, D. (2017). *The Inspiring Change Manchester Housing First Pilot: Interim Report*. University of York; Jones, K., Gibbons, A. and Brown, P. (2019). *Assessing the Impact of Housing First in Brighton and Westminster*. University of Salford and St Mungo's.

^{xi} Abdul Aziz, S and Boobis, S (2024) *More Than a Roof: Exploring the holistic outcomes of Housing First*. Homeless Link.

^{xii} Abdul Aziz, S and Boobis, S (2024) *More Than a Roof: Exploring the holistic outcomes of Housing First*. Homeless Link.

^{xiii} Bretheron, J. and Pleace, N. (2015) *Housing First in England: An Evaluation of Nine Services*. University of York.

^{xiv} Centre for Social Justice. (2021). *Delivering a National Housing First Programme in England*.

^{xv} Blood, I., Goldup, M., Peter, L. and Dulson, S. (2018). *Implementing Housing First across England, Scotland and Wales*. Imogen Blood & Associates. Crisis and Homeless Link.

^{xvi} Centre for Social Justice (2021). *Delivering a National Housing First Programme in England*.

^{xvii} Housing First England (2020). *The Picture of Housing First in England*. Homeless Link.

^{xviii} Rice, B. (2018). *Investigating the Current and Future Funding of Housing First in England*. Homeless Link.

^{xix} MHCLG (2022). *Mobilising Housing First Toolkit: From Planning to Early Implementation*.

^{xx} MHCLG (2022). *Mobilising Housing First Toolkit: From Planning to Early Implementation*.

^{xxi} Quilgars, D. and Pleace, N. (2017). *The Threshold Housing First Pilot for Women with an Offending History: The First Two Years*. University of York.

^{xxii} Housing First Europe Hub (2023). *What is Housing First for Youth (HF4Y)?* Web. Available at: <https://housingfirsteurope.eu/what-is-hf/youth/>

^{xxiii} Housing First Europe Hub (2022). *An Introduction to Housing First for Youth (HF4Y)*.