

COVID-19 Transition

Transitioning to Housing First

About

This information is extracted from the Covid-19 Transition guidance for Local Authorities published in May 2020: <https://homeless.org.uk/connect/blogs/2020/may/18/everyoneinforgood-%E2%80%93-ending-rough-sleeping-for-good-after-lockdown>

Transitioning to Housing First

Housing First is an internationally recognised and evidence-based approach to ending homelessness for people experiencing multiple and complex needs. Housing First services have been commissioned in England since 2010 using an Intensive Case Management approach (where the team provide holistic support and act as navigators into other services). Local areas are finding ways to develop services to meet the needs and wishes of some of their most vulnerable people.

Housing First is underpinned by a key set of principles which guide the ethos of the service in how it should be delivered.¹ To ensure the service is delivered in line with the principles, these operational practices must be in place:

- Services target individuals with multiple and complex needs and for whom other types of housing and support solutions have been ineffective
- There is a commitment to providing long-term support: although in practice funding might be short-term, there are no expectations that people must move on from the support. Support follows the person and is not linked to a specific property.
- Access to housing is not conditional on individuals having to meet certain requirements but a period of pre-tenancy engagement and support is essential before a housing placement is made²
- There is security of tenure: people are not given licenses and have the same tenancy as anyone else in that kind of home
- There is a maximum caseload size of seven individuals to one worker, which allows support to be intensive and personalised

This transition period is the perfect opportunity to consider how you may prevent people with high and complex needs, currently residing in hotels, from returning to the streets or unstable housing, whilst also meeting the needs of those who remained on or returned to the street during lockdown. This document outlines our recommendations for supporting the transition from hotels to Housing First in three different scenarios.

¹ www.hfe.homeless.org.uk/principles-housing-first

² Such as addressing drug or alcohol use, engaging with mental health services, or related to their previous housing experience. At the moment, individuals would be expected to have recourse to public funds in order to claim benefits for their housing costs.

Your Housing First service has capacity to take on new clients

If the Housing First team can begin engaging with the person before transition it provides the ideal opportunity to build the relationship and discuss accommodation options. If there has been no opportunity for this work to take place, or there is a delay in finding a suitable home, then we recommend that the temporary accommodation placement is sustained until a relationship with the Housing First worker has been established, and the individual has an appropriate offer of a tenancy.

Your Housing First service is at capacity

Although many areas now have a Housing First service, they may be fairly small scale and already have reached capacity. If other individuals have been identified as suitable for Housing First, then the local authority should look to expand their existing Housing First provision to reduce the likelihood of these individuals returning to repeat homelessness.

We recommend that:

- Funding is identified to increase staffing based on the recommended caseload size of one worker to no more than seven clients, or where the numbers are very low (e.g. one or two people) the service looks to re-profile the caseload in order to absorb new clients with higher level of need³
- Temporary accommodation placements are sustained throughout the transition period to prevent people from returning to the street and to enable engagement to continue
- While staff are being recruited to new roles, steps are taken to provide interim support to individuals in temporary accommodation, including introducing them to the Housing First service.

Your area does not yet have a Housing First service

Setting up a Housing First service from scratch isn't always easy and can take time. However, the pandemic has proven that local areas can focus their efforts and work in partnership to develop new service models and approaches relatively quickly. Mobilising Housing First as a transition option for your local area is not unachievable but will require planning, flexibility and partnership working.

Once you have identified the need for provision in your area you will be able to determine the scale of your service and work with partners to plan and mobilise. Key things to consider are:

Housing

- Engage housing teams and social landlords to gain commitment around provision of units and flexibility in policies and procedures to enable access to this group. This will include flexing policies around eligibility, as many may have been excluded in the past due to arrears or ASB, and how properties are allocated allocations (e.g. direct lets and opportunities for refusal). Properties do not need to be identified in advance and should be sourced based on the needs and requirements of clients (within reason) which may include sourcing from the private rented sector.
- Ensure housing providers understand the intentions of Housing First and work together to plan in advance how you will address and mitigate any issues which arise throughout the tenancy (such as how

³ This should only be done in instances where people on the existing caseload are more stable or dormant and where the overall team capacity would not be stretched should a minimal number of new clients be taken on. Equally, developing a 'step down' worker post with a slightly higher caseload of individuals requiring less intense support may increase capacity for other post holders.

housing and support staff will work together and how to respond to ASB). Consider using SLAs to formalise working agreements, these may vary for each housing provider.

- Properties sourced should fall within the LHA rate and should be covered through the benefit system so that the individual can sustain the tenancy in the long-term (this includes considering the implications of any changes to welfare support as a result of covid-19). Rental costs should not be included in the support contract.
- Costs associated with housing, which may be included within the support contract, include tenancy deposits (for PRS homes), funds to deal with particular issues (such as damage, lost keys), and furniture/personal budgets.

Support

- Most Housing First services are commissioned by the local authority, although consider working with other commissioning streams to pool funding.
- Capacity of the service should be determined based on the number of individuals: one support worker to every 5-7 people and an appropriate amount of management support due to the intensive nature of this type of work.
- Where only one worker is needed, make sure that they are embedded in another service that can provide additional support to the staff member and those on their caseload. However, a single worker service is not recommended due to the nature of the work and issues that may arise through staff absence. This is where cross-border commissioning/delivery may be beneficial.
- To attract and retain the right kind of staff, ensure that salaries are set at senior support worker level for your area and that funding is included for adequate training and support (e.g. reflective practice).
- There are other costs associated with Housing First (such as the provision of personalised budgets and engagement activities). For more in-depth research and guidance for commissioning and costing Housing First: www.hfe.homeless.org.uk.⁴

Access to wider health and social care provision is also crucial in Housing First but can be achieved through engaging strategic partners during the planning and mobilisation process, and supporting the development of operational relationships once the support provider is in place.

Timescales for mobilisation

Be realistic regarding how long it will take to mobilise the service and in terms of the outcomes you expect to see (ensuring this is in line with the principles). This will depend on the scale and delays may be caused by governance arrangements, commissioning processes and effective staff recruitment depending on local requirements. Offering a 'pilot' or 'test-phase' while this is underway can help to keep individuals engaged in the meantime. Either way, we recommend that funding is provided to sustain temporary accommodation placements with some level of support and engagement during mobilisation.

For more information

For more information on commissioning or providing Housing First, please visit the Housing First England website www.hfe.homeless.org.uk.

⁴ <https://hfe.homeless.org.uk/commissioners> (see guidance for commissioners and ITT examples)
<https://hfe.homeless.org.uk/our-research> (see 'cost-effectiveness' and 'current and future funding')



What we do

Homeless Link is the national membership charity for frontline homelessness services. We work to improve services through research, guidance and learning, and campaign for policy change that will ensure everyone has a place to call home and the support they need to keep it.

Let's end homelessness together

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