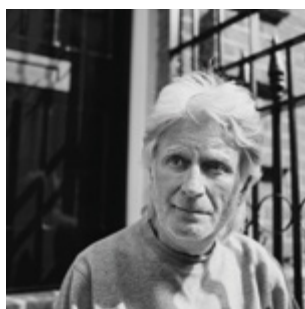


NO PLACE LIKE HOME

Scaling up Housing First in England

July 2025



Contents

About the CSJ	2
Acknowledgements	3
Acknowledgements	4
Foreword	5
Foreword	6
Foreword	7
Executive Summary	8
Introduction	10
Chapter one: State of the Nation - Homelessness and Rough Sleeping	11
Homelessness and rough sleeping trends	11
Migration and homelessness	20
A change of government	23
Chapter two: Housing First and Its Place in the Homelessness System	25
What is Housing First and who is it for?	25
Housing First outcomes	37
Policy and political change.....	44
Chapter three: The Future of Housing First in England	49
Establishing a national Housing First programme.....	49
Delivering a national Housing First programme	60
Conclusion	75
List of Recommendations	76
A national Housing First programme.....	76
Non-housing outcomes	78
Securing access to housing.....	79

About the CSJ

Established in 2004, the Centre for Social Justice (CSJ) is an independent think-tank that studies the root causes of Britain's social problems and addresses them by recommending practical, workable policy interventions.

The CSJ's vision is to give people in the United Kingdom (UK) who are experiencing the worst multiple disadvantages and injustice every possible opportunity to reach their full potential. The majority of the CSJ's work is organised around five "pathways to poverty", first identified in our ground-breaking 2007 report, *Breakthrough Britain*. These are: educational failure; family breakdown; economic dependency and worklessness; addiction to drugs and alcohol; and severe personal debt.

Since its inception, the CSJ has changed the landscape of our political discourse by putting social justice at the heart of British politics. This has led to a transformation in government thinking and policy. For instance, in March 2013, the CSJ report *It Happens Here* shone a light on the horrific reality of human trafficking and modern slavery in the UK. As a direct result of this report, the government passed the *Modern Slavery Act 2015*, one of the first pieces of legislation in the world to address slavery and trafficking in the 21st century.

Our research is informed by experts including prominent academics, practitioners and policymakers. We also draw upon our CSJ Alliance, a unique group of charities, social enterprises, and other grassroots organisations that have a proven track-record of reversing social breakdown across the UK.

The social challenges facing Britain remain serious. In 2025 and beyond, we will continue to advance the cause of social justice so that more people can continue to fulfil their potential.

Acknowledgements

We would like to especially thank Steve Morgan CBE and the Steve Morgan Foundation for making this report on Housing First possible.

The Steve Morgan Foundation is passionately committed to changing lives for good, by working with partners that make a positive difference to those in need.

As founder and former chairman of one of the UK's most successful homebuilders, Redrow, the CSJ is grateful to Steve Morgan CBE for sharing his expertise on housing and homelessness policy.



Disclaimer: Please note that the views, findings and recommendations presented in this report are those of the CSJ alone, and not necessarily those of any organisation or individual who has fed into or enabled our research. Any errors remain our own.

Acknowledgements

We are grateful to the individuals and organisations who have generously given their time and experience during our research.

In particular, we would like to thank the Mayor of the Liverpool City Region, Steve Rotheram, Liverpool City Region Housing First and Greater Manchester Housing First, for participating in an expert roundtable to reflect on lessons from delivery and discuss how Housing First should be scaled across the rest of England.

We would also like to extend our thanks to Southwark Council Housing First service users for sharing their stories and experiences at a lived experience roundtable. We are grateful to staff at Southwark Housing First for helping to facilitate this roundtable.

We would also like to thank the following individuals and organisations who spoke to us and provided evidence during our research: Action Homeless Leicester, Beverley Housing Charity, Bristol City Council Housing First, Centrepoin, Chess Homeless, Community Campus 87, Crisis, Cymorth Cymru, Emmaus North East, Homeless Link, Homeless Network Scotland, the Homelessness Research Programme at Kings College London, Housing Justice, Key Community, Lambeth Council, Liam Geraghty, Matter South Yorkshire CIC, the Bond Board, the Simon Community Scotland, the Single Homeless Project, Tower Hamlets Council, the National Housing Federation, Oasis Community Housing and Shelter.

We are grateful to the Wates Family Enterprise Trust for supporting the CSJ's housing and communities workstream.

Wates Family
ENTERPRISE TRUST

Disclaimer: Please note that the views, findings and recommendations presented in this report are those of the CSJ alone, and not necessarily those of any organisation or individual who has fed into or enabled our research. Any errors remain our own.

Foreword

The true measure of any decent society is how it treats its most vulnerable.

In 2025, it's unthinkable that people are to be sleeping in a doorway, bouncing between hostels, or crashing on sofas just to make it through the night. Yet that's still the reality for too many people across our country.

Homelessness is one of the starkest signs of a system that isn't working – but it doesn't have to be this way.

Through devolution, we've been given the tools – and the trust – to do things differently. In the Liverpool City Region, we used that opportunity to trial Housing First: a radical, but refreshingly simple idea. Give someone a stable home first – and then wrap the right support around them.

No hoops to jump through. No revolving door of temporary fixes. Just a permanent roof over someone's head, and the dignity of being treated as a person, not a problem.

It's worked. Over 400 people in our region now have a place to call home, and nearly 90 per cent have sustained their tenancies – far higher than traditional approaches. And it's not just the human case that's compelling; the financial case stacks up too: every £1 invested returns £2 in savings to the public purse. In our region, it's proven to be three and a half times more effective than conventional models.

Earlier this year, I joined a CSJ roundtable to discuss how we can scale this success nationwide. The message was loud and clear: local leaders are ready to deliver but we need national leadership to turn these successful pilots into national policy.

Devolution gave us the space to be bold. Now, national government has the chance to be just as bold in return.

Housing First is not just a successful pilot – it's a model for reform. We've proven it works. Now we need to match that with ambition, and make it the foundation of a national mission to end homelessness for good.



Steve Rotheram

Mayor of the Liverpool City Region

Foreword

When I first entered Parliament in 2001, the last Labour government had spent its first term laying the groundwork for 3,500 permanent housing units, housing 5,500 people who had once slept on our streets.¹ In power, we cut rough sleeping by three quarters.² That achievement proved what's possible when there's the political will to tackle homelessness head-on.

Tragically, that progress was squandered, with city-regions like mine left to pick up the pieces. This report by the CSJ shows that rough sleeping is close to record levels, an increase of 164 per cent since 2010. Here in Greater Manchester, we decided not to wait for Westminster to act. We have reduced levels of rough sleeping since 2017 and have been laying the groundwork for a new approach to tackling homelessness, one that reflects both our values and the scale of the challenge. For us, tackling homelessness is not just an economic imperative, but a moral mission.

When I became Mayor in 2018, I kept hearing people talking about Finland and Housing First. So, I got on a plane and went to see for myself. It was life changing. By rolling out Housing First nationally, Finland had all but eradicated rough sleeping. It was this experience that helped us become one of the first city-regions in the country to pilot Housing First. The model is simple but powerful. Safe and secure housing with no conditions attached, meaning people can seek support without fear of becoming homeless again. Over the past seven years, we've helped over 400 people with the most complex needs move out of homelessness and into a better life. Many of those individuals had spent years on and off the streets at a great cost to themselves and the public.

The approach we've taken in Greater Manchester shows there's another way. If you set people up to succeed – they largely do. In 2024, I was proud to welcome the Finnish Ambassador, Jukka Siukosaari, to Greater Manchester to showcase the impact of our Housing First programme. Our conversations made one thing clear: what has worked in Finland can work here too if we match their ambition and will to end homelessness.

The Labour government was elected on a promise to end sticking plaster solutions. Housing First is exactly that: a long-term, ambitious, and transformational policy that works to end homelessness for the vast majority of people supported by it. I welcome this report by the CSJ which sets out a clear path for how the government can support the scale-up of Housing First across England, so that every region can share in the success we've seen here in Greater Manchester.



Andy Burnham

Andy Burnham

Mayor of Greater Manchester

¹ House of Commons Library, Rough sleeping in England: Local and national government action, January 2025, p. 26.

² Ibid, p. 6.

Foreword

I know firsthand the importance of a stable home. Without one, nothing else in life works, neither your health, nor your relationships, nor your ability to find or keep a job. That's why I believe Housing First holds the key to tackling rough sleeping in England.

Housing First begins with a simple but powerful principle: a permanent home. From that solid foundation, people can access the tailored, wraparound support they need to address deep-rooted challenges. It's an approach rooted in common sense, recognising that no one can rebuild their life whilst trapped in an endless cycle of homelessness, emergency accommodation, and crisis services.

And it works. In my home city of Liverpool, Housing First has been incubated and refined through one of three national pilots. Over four years, more than 1,000 people were housed across the pilots, and of those still in the programme, 84 per cent remained in long-term accommodation after three years.

The recommendations in this report represent a downpayment on ending the scourge of rough sleeping. But to do so, we must also confront the deeper, structural issues behind our national housing crisis.

As a housebuilder, I know that we cannot end homelessness without addressing the reasons why we've failed to build enough homes. Although the government has taken welcome steps to reform the planning system, it has inherited the consequences of half a century of under delivery, and it must now go further and faster if it is to meet its ambition of building 1.5 million new homes.

Housing First cannot succeed without housing. This report from the CSJ outlines practical ways for government to unlock millions in capital funding to deliver the permanent homes needed to make Housing First a reality.

At the Steve Morgan Foundation, we are proud to support this work. We know the transformative impact of Housing First in our region. It is now time for the government to take this success to the rest of England.



Steve Morgan CBE

Chairman of the Steve Morgan Foundation

Businessman, philanthropist, founder and former chairman of housebuilder, Redrow

Executive Summary

Homelessness and rough sleeping are on the rise in England. In 2024, rough sleeping was up 20 per cent on the previous year, and 91 per cent since the COVID-19 pandemic.³ The years following the success of ‘Everyone In’ have been marked by rising homelessness, increasingly visible on the streets of England’s cities and towns. Rough sleeping is just the tip of the iceberg. Last year, English councils spent £2.3 billion on temporary accommodation,⁴ a crisis that is pushing local authorities to the point of bankruptcy.

The current government was elected on a manifesto promise to put Britain back on track to ending homelessness.⁵ An extra £233 million for homelessness was announced at the Autumn Budget in 2024, taking total spending up to nearly £1 billion for this financial year.⁶ In a move welcomed by the sector, the Chancellor committed to protecting this spending in the 2025 Spending Review.⁷

This means that the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) has a unique opportunity to ensure that this funding settlement is spent on interventions that are proven to work.

Over the last seven years, Housing First has been shown to be the most effective and well-evidenced intervention to end homelessness for Britain’s most disadvantaged and entrenched rough sleepers. Without a commitment to rolling it out further, the government will struggle to meet its manifesto commitment by the end of the Parliament.

In this report we make the case for a targeted expansion of Housing First in England, to deliver 5,571 places by 2029/30. This would scale-out the success of the three national pilots in Liverpool City Region, Greater Manchester and West Midlands, ensuring that every English region has access to an equivalent Housing First intervention. Alongside a cross-government strategy that is focused on prevention, a national Housing First programme will respond to the most severe consequences of homelessness, by targeting the most vulnerable and disadvantaged cohort.

Multiple high-quality studies back up the impact of Housing First and the amount of evidence supporting it far exceeds other homelessness services.⁸ Housing First is 3.5 times more effective in enabling its service user cohort to secure and sustain permanent housing than conventional homeless services.⁹ It’s also value for money. For every £1 invested into Housing First, up to £2 is returned to the taxpayer.¹⁰ Housing First has proved an enormous success in pilots across three English regions, with 84 per cent of service users sustaining long-term housing after three years.¹¹

3 CSJ analysis of Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, Rough sleeping snapshot in England: autumn 2024, February 2025.

4 CSJ analysis of Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, General Fund Revenue Account Outturn – RO4 Housing Services 2023-24, December 2024.

5 The Labour Party, Change: Labour Party Manifesto 2024, June 2024, p. 80.

6 HM Treasury, Autumn Budget 2024: Fixing the foundations to deliver change, October 2024, p. 92.

7 HM Treasury, Spending Review 2025, June 2025, p. 76.

8 Centre for Homelessness Impact, Intervention Tool: Housing First, n.d. Accessed: <https://www.homelessnessimpact.org/intervention/housing-first>.

9 Campbell Tickell, LCRC Housing First Pilot: Local Evaluation, April 2022, p. 9.

10 CSJ analysis of Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, Evaluation of the Housing First Pilots: Cost Benefit Analysis – Final Report, October 2024.

11 Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, Evaluation of the Housing First Pilots: Final synthesis report, October 2024, p. 31.

Housing First combines access to permanent housing with intensive, wrap-around support for people whose homelessness is compounded by multiple and complex challenges. It is different from conventional interventions as it offers permanent housing from the start, dependent on an individual's willingness to maintain a tenancy. Housing is sustained by intensive support, with staff having low caseloads of four to six service users, rather than between the usual 20 and 40.

Despite its success, the potential of Housing First has been largely untapped. Just 2,824 places are available, just over half of what is needed for a national rollout. Without a greater commitment to Housing First, those whose homelessness is compounded by severe mental illness, addiction, and criminal behaviour will be left to drift, passed between prisons, hospital wards, and hostels – at risk to the public and to the dangers of life on the streets.

This also means that any expansion of Housing First must be backed up by a commitment to prevent homelessness and rough sleeping occurring in the first place. Alongside a more affordable and secure housing market, this also means addressing the root causes of poverty, like family breakdown, addiction, debt, educational failure and worklessness.

A national Housing First programme would cost £103 million over four years. We propose that this is funded by removing relocation expenses for civil servants, cutting the costs of the Places for Growth programme, utilising the new Transformation Fund and allocating 5.5 per cent of the Rough Sleeping Prevention and Recovery Grant (RSPARG) for Housing First.

This report provides a blueprint of how the government should design and implement a national Housing First programme. This requires:

- › Ensuring national stewardship with a ringfence for Housing First within the newly consolidated RSPARG
- › Embedding a monitoring and fidelity framework with a shared understanding and vision for Housing First in England, accompanied by a yearly check-up report published by MHCLG
- › Encouraging the development and commissioning of combined authority Housing First services
- › Confirming that the new Affordable Homes Programme and capital funding streams for homelessness accommodation are able to deliver long-term homes for Housing First
- › Implementing an allocations policy which prioritises those with a local and UK connection
- › Facilitating engagement with addiction and employment support

Introduction

Since 2017, the CSJ has advocated for Housing First to play a greater role within the policy response to homelessness and rough sleeping in England. We published our first report, *Housing First*, in 2017 after which the then Secretary of State, Sajid Javid, committed £28 million to three national pilots in Greater Manchester, West Midlands and Liverpool City Region.

After the 2019 Conservative government pledged to end rough sleeping by the end of their parliamentary term, the CSJ published *Close to Home*, drawing on early evidence from the national pilots and international case studies to show how the government could scale up Housing First in England to meet this ambition.

The purpose of this report is to synthesise and update this research, drawing on the conclusion of the Housing First national pilots' evaluation and reflecting the change in government, all occurring in the context of significant economic disruption since the COVID-19 pandemic.

This report recommends that Housing First becomes a core part of the government's ambition to end homelessness. We make the case for a targeted national Housing First programme, delivering 5,571 places for England's most disadvantaged and entrenched rough sleepers.

The economic and social landscape has changed since the CSJ published *Close to Home* in 2021. High inflation, interest rates and low economic growth has affected the ability of the government to spend more on non-statutory responses to homelessness like Housing First.

Mass migration has also changed the nature of rough sleeping in England, contributing to a surge in numbers since the end of the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2024, 27 per cent of rough sleepers held non-UK nationalities, compared to 20 per cent in 2017. Including those with not known nationalities, the non-UK proportion rises to 37 per cent.¹²

This report is focused on Housing First as a distinct service model, examining what role it should play within England's response to homelessness and rough sleeping, rather than creating a wider Housing First philosophy. The structure of this paper is as follows:

- › In Chapter One, we look at the state of the nation when it comes to homelessness and rough sleeping trends, as well as the impact of the change in government following the 2024 General Election
- › In Chapter Two, we outline what Housing First is and who it should be for, as well as the evidence from the national pilots
- › In Chapter Three, we make 12 recommendations on how the government should implement a national Housing First programme in England

As homelessness is a devolved matter, this report is solely concerned with England. We draw on case studies from Scotland and Wales.

Our methodology for estimating the total caseload for a national Housing First programme is detailed in Chapter Three.

¹² CSJ analysis of Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, Rough sleeping snapshot in England: autumn 2024, February 2025.

Chapter one:

State of the Nation - Homelessness and Rough Sleeping

In this chapter we outline the trends in homelessness and rough sleeping over time, including a profile of England's rough sleepers and their needs. We show how unprecedented levels of migration in recent years have contributed to a surge in rough sleeping. We also outline steps taken by the previous Conservative government and the new Labour government to tackle homelessness and rough sleeping.

Homelessness and rough sleeping trends

Homelessness

Homelessness is complex, broad and encompasses a range of experiences. Described simply, homelessness is the lack of a stable, safe and reasonable place to live. It includes people sleeping rough which is the most visible form of homelessness. It also includes hidden homelessness, which is when individuals live in hostels, squats, B&Bs or concealed housing and are often not entitled to local authority help.

Estimating the number of people experiencing homelessness is difficult, mainly because it is often hidden and takes many different forms. In 2024, Shelter estimated that at least 354,000 people were homeless in England, mostly due to a rise in the number of people sleeping rough and families living in temporary accommodation.¹³ At the lower end, the 2021 Census identified a smaller cohort, 13,955 people, who were living in hostels and temporary shelters.¹⁴

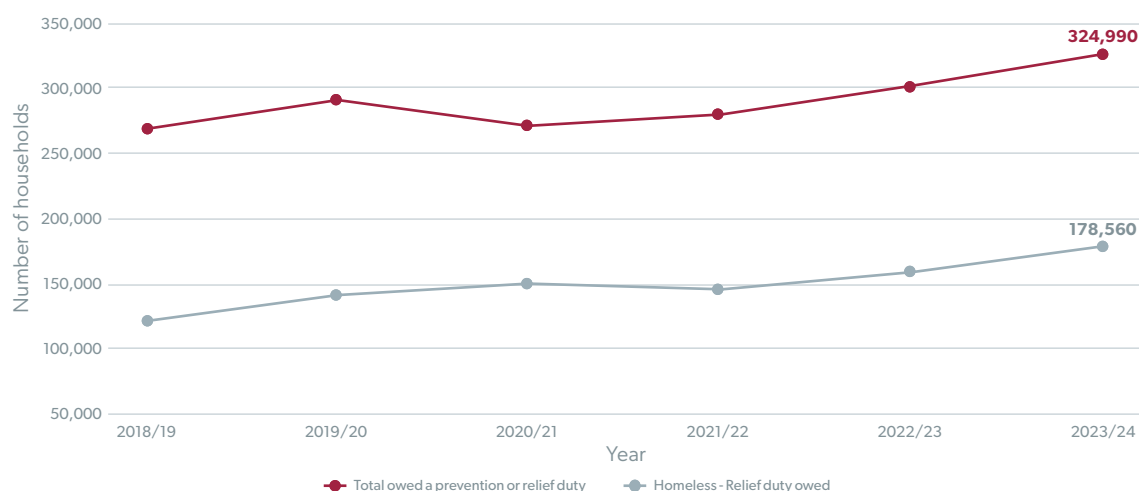
The number of households owed a 'homeless' duty by their local authority has climbed in recent years. A 'homeless duty' is the term that describes the legal requirement of local authorities to help eligible households avoid homelessness (the prevention duty) or secure suitable accommodation if they are homeless (the relief duty).¹⁵ The number of households owed a duty has risen from 269,510 in 2018/19 to 324,990 in 2023/24. Within that figure, the number of households owed a relief duty has also risen from 121,630 in 2018/19 to 178,560 in 2023/24.

13 Shelter, At least 354,000 people homeless in England today, December 2024. Accessed: https://england.shelter.org.uk/media/press_release/at_least_354000_people_homeless_in_england_today_.

14 Office for National Statistics, People experiencing homelessness, England and Wales: Census 2021, December 2023.

15 House of Commons Library, Statutory homelessness (England): The legal framework and performance, July 2024, p. 10.

Figure 1: Number of households in England assessed as owed a duty by their local authority

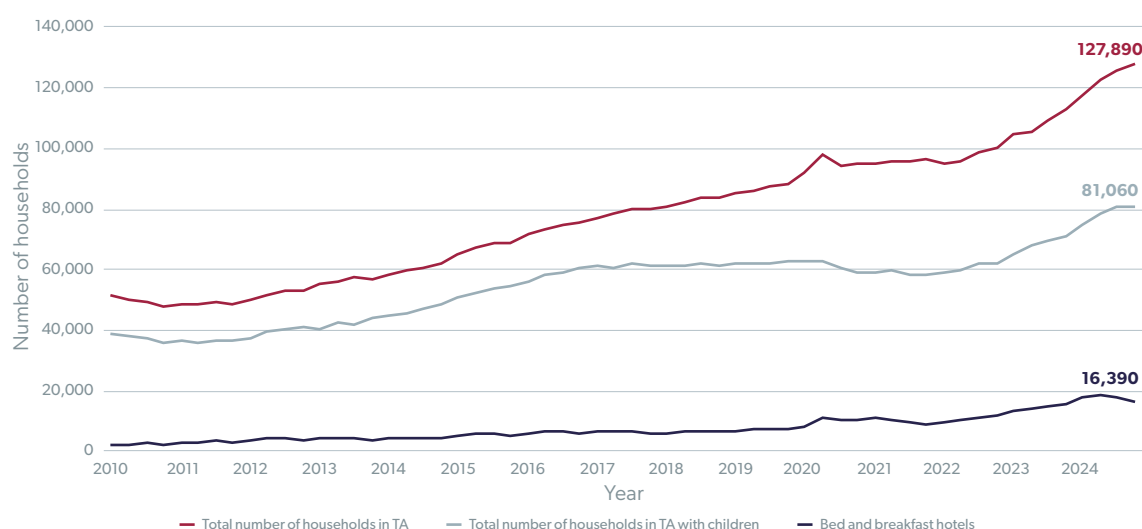


Source: CSJ analysis of MHCLG, Statutory homelessness live tables, April 2025.

If an applicant for local authority assistance is successful and they are in priority need, the local authority must ensure that suitable temporary accommodation is available. Households must also be granted interim accommodation whilst they are waiting for a decision on their application (if the local authority believes they may be homeless, eligible for assistance and have a priority need).

Latest statistics show that in England, 127,890 households are living in temporary accommodation as of Q4 2024, including 165,510 children.¹⁶ The number of households in temporary accommodation has increased by 149 per cent since 2010.¹⁷ Temporary accommodation is meant to be short-term housing, provided by local authorities to those experiencing or at immediate risk of homelessness. Despite this, some households can live in temporary accommodation for years at a time.

Figure 2: Total number of households in England living in temporary accommodation (TA)



Source: CSJ analysis of MHCLG, Statutory homelessness live tables, April 2025.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ 51,310 households living in TA in Q1 2010, 127,890 households living in TA in Q4 2024. Percentage increase = 149.25 per cent.

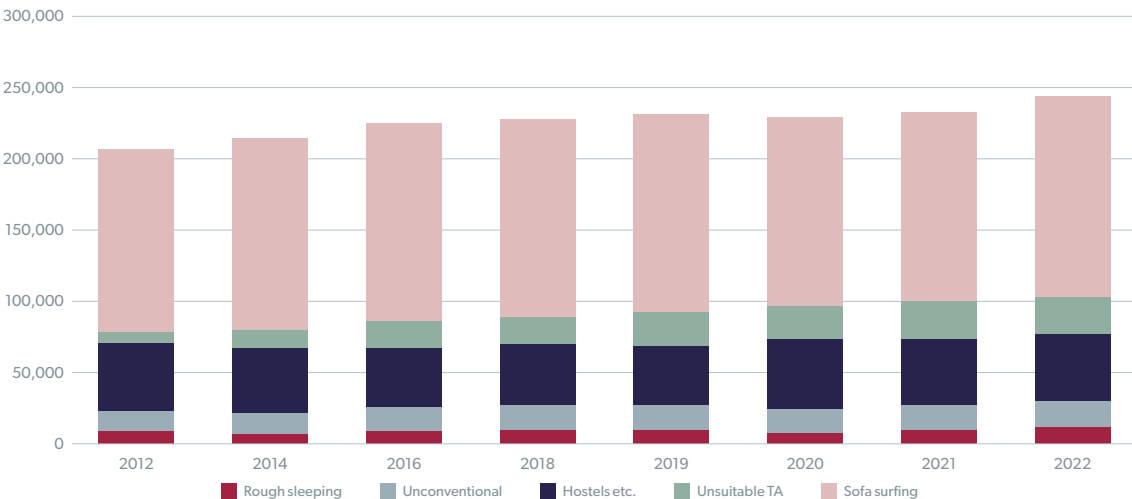
The duty to provide temporary accommodation has placed substantial financial strain on local authorities, rising to £2.3 billion in 2023/24.¹⁸ In October 2024, the Local Government Association reported that nearly one in four councils were likely to need emergency government support to stave off bankruptcy in the next two years.¹⁹ This has meant that many local authorities have struggled to deliver their statutory responsibilities to all households, particularly single adults without children, leaving many with no option but to sleep rough.²⁰

Core homelessness

Core homelessness estimates published by Crisis help to paint a picture of the total level of acute homelessness across the country. Since 2011, Crisis and Heriot-Watt University have published *The Homelessness Monitor*, a longitudinal study analysing the impacts of economic and policy developments across Great Britain on homelessness. The study estimates the 'core' homeless population, which captures the most acute forms of homelessness.²¹

In 2022, the latest version of the monitor estimated that the core homeless population was 242,000 in England, an increase from 206,400 in 2012. The change in core homelessness over time can be seen below in Figure 3.

Figure 3: Core homelessness (households) estimates by category



Source: Figure 5.1, Crisis, *The Homelessness Monitor: England 2023*, July 2023, p. 93.

Core homelessness has been steadily rising since 2012, falling during the initial year of the COVID-19 pandemic, and rising thenceforth. By 2025, Crisis predicted that core homelessness would be over 250,000, around one fifth higher than in 2020,²² and would steadily rise to 300,000 by 2041.

18 Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, General Fund Revenue Account Outturn – RO4 Housing Services 2023-24, December 2024.

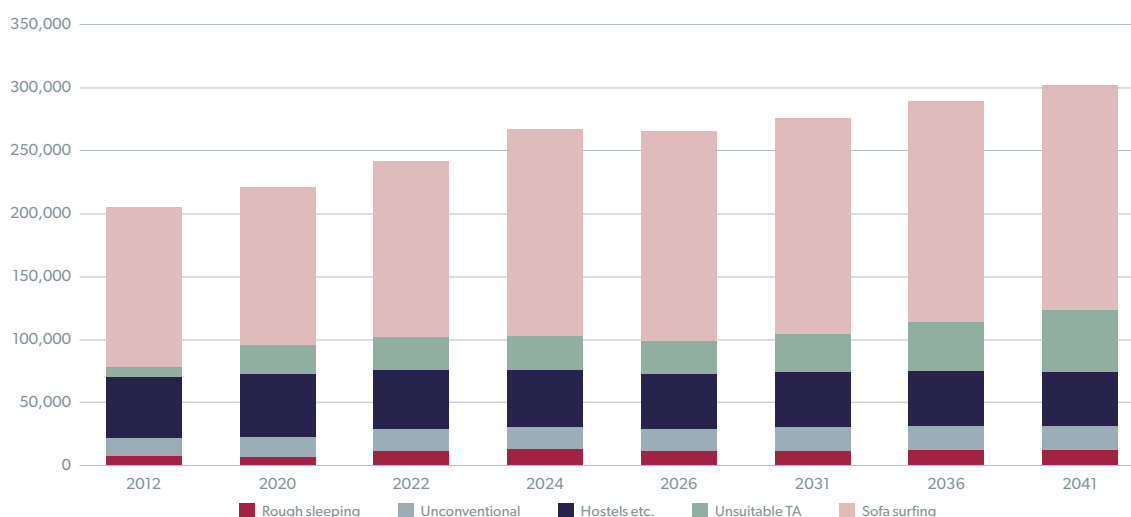
19 Local Government Association, 1 in 4 councils likely to need emergency government support – LGA survey, October 2024. Accessed: [https://www.local.gov.uk/about/news/1-4-councils-likely-need-emergency-government-support-lga-survey#:~:text=1%20in%204%20councils%20likely%20to%20need%20emergency%20government%20support%20%E2%80%93%20LGA%20survey.&text=One%20in%20four%20councils%20in%20England%20say,the%20Local%20Government%20Association%20\(LGA\)%20reveals%20today](https://www.local.gov.uk/about/news/1-4-councils-likely-need-emergency-government-support-lga-survey#:~:text=1%20in%204%20councils%20likely%20to%20need%20emergency%20government%20support%20%E2%80%93%20LGA%20survey.&text=One%20in%20four%20councils%20in%20England%20say,the%20Local%20Government%20Association%20(LGA)%20reveals%20today).

20 Crisis, Written evidence submitted by Crisis [RSL 001] to the Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee, January 2025, p. 5.

21 'Core homelessness' includes people sleeping rough, but also those staying in places not intended as residential accommodation (e.g. cars, tents, boats, sheds, etc.), living in homeless hostels, refuges and shelters, placed in unsuitable temporary accommodation (e.g. Bed and Breakfast hotels, Out of Area Placements, etc.), and sofa surfing (i.e., staying with non-family, on a short-term basis, in overcrowded conditions).

22 Crisis, *The Homelessness Monitor: England 2023*, July 2023, p. 96.

Figure 4: Core homelessness (households) projections by category



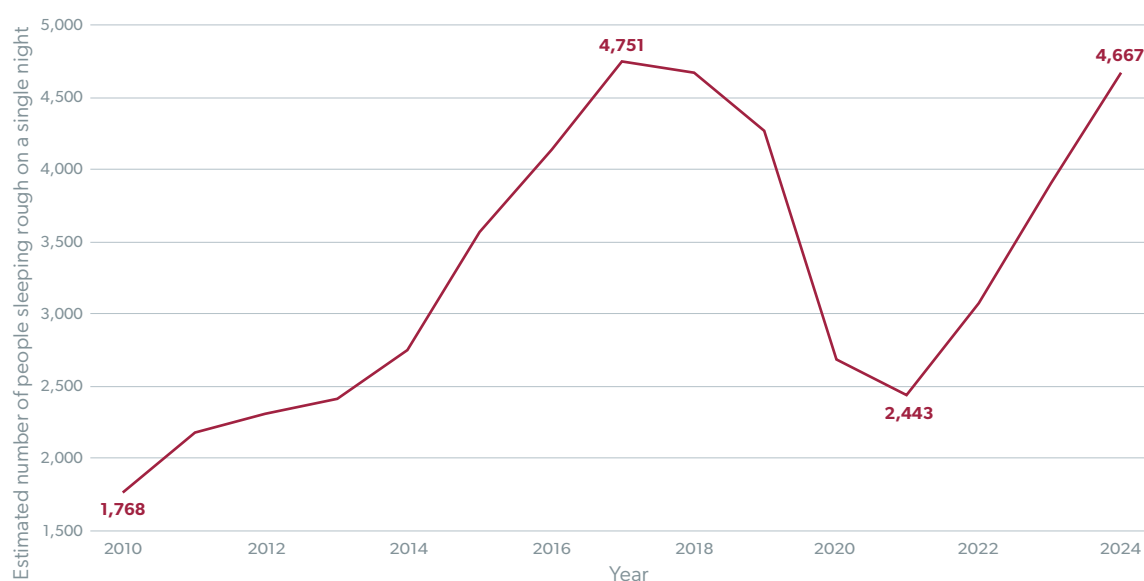
Source: Figure 5.4, Crisis, The Homelessness Monitor: England 2023, July 2023, p. 96.

Rough sleeping

Rough sleeping is a specific type of homelessness where someone sleeps outside. Housing First is targeted at people who often have had an experience of current or past rough sleeping. Rough sleeping trends closely mirror broader patterns of homelessness, and like both statutory and core homelessness, have risen over time.

Every year MHCLG publishes an annual snapshot of the number of people estimated to be sleeping rough on a single night in England. This data shows a significant increase in the number of people seen rough sleeping since 2010. Latest data from autumn 2024 indicates that 4,667 people were seen sleeping rough on a single night, a 20 per cent increase since 2023, a 91 per cent increase since 2021 and a 164 per cent increase since 2010. The year-on-year trend can be seen below in Figure 5.

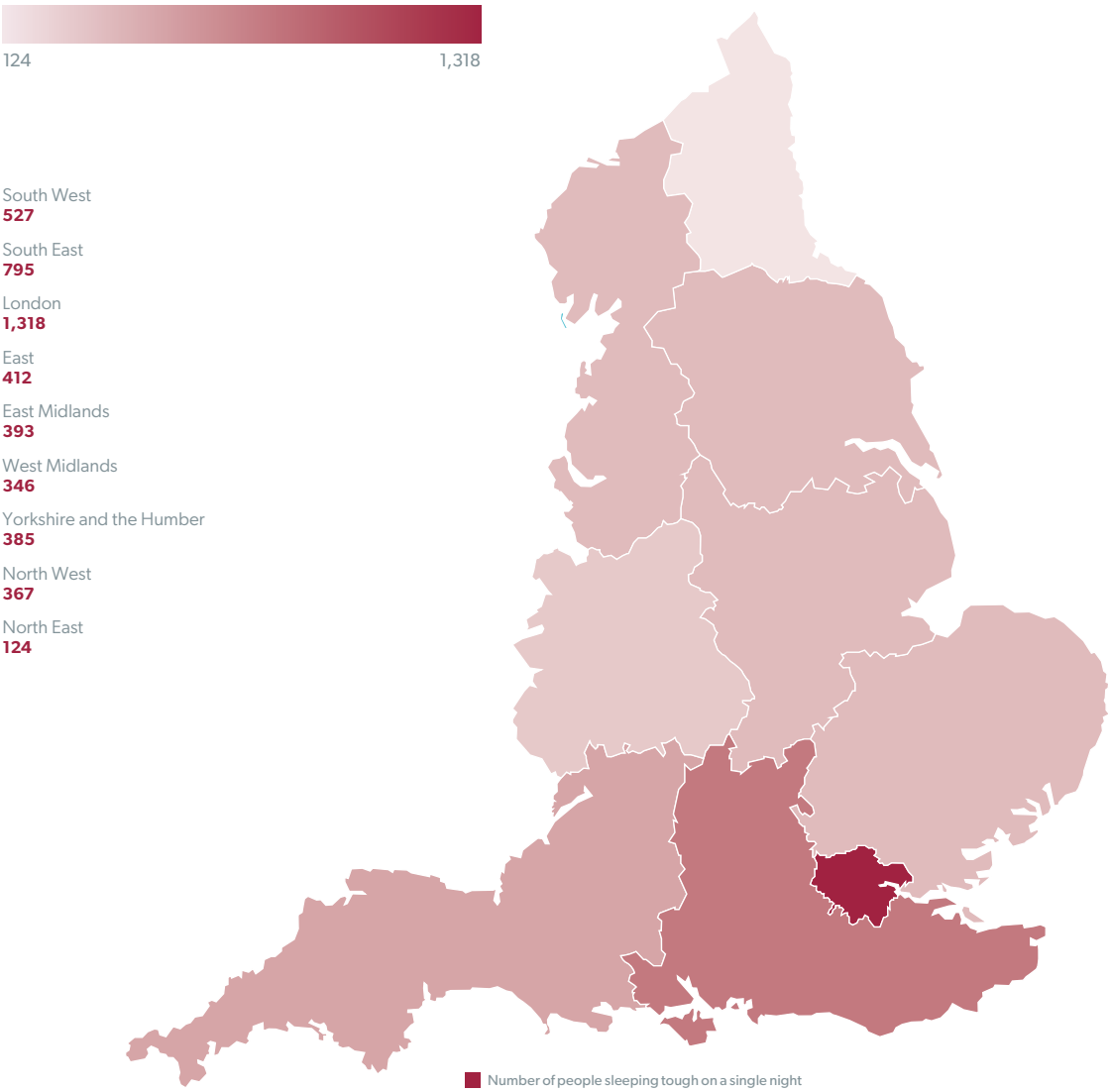
Figure 5: Number of people sleeping rough on a single night in autumn



Source: CSJ analysis of MHCLG, Rough sleeping snapshot in England: autumn 2024, February 2025.

The number of people sleeping rough on a single night also varies significantly by region. Nearly half (45 per cent) of people counted were in London and the South East. The region with the largest percentage increase in 2024 was Yorkshire and the Humber, up 43 per cent from 2023. The only region to see a decrease in the last year was the North West (minus two per cent), where two regional Housing First services are in operation.

Figure 6: Number of people sleeping rough on a single night in Autumn, by region



Source: CSJ analysis of MHCLG, Rough sleeping snapshot in England: autumn 2024, February 2025.

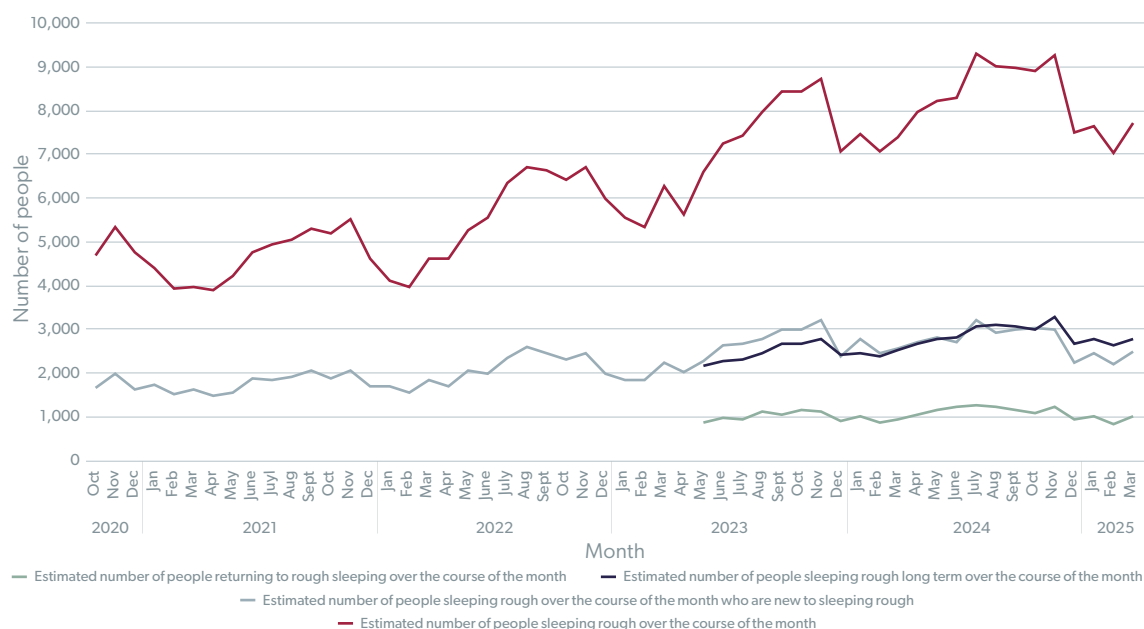
Whilst the rough sleeping snapshot is helpful as an indicator of change in the number of people sleeping rough over time, it cannot estimate the total number of people who have slept rough at least once in the last year, a figure which is likely to be much higher than 4,667. For example, the number of people estimated to be sleeping rough over the course of March 2025 was 7,718. This is 2.2 times the number seen sleeping rough on a single night that month (3,438), highlighting the significant degree to which people flow on and off the street.²³

23 Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, Rough sleeping data framework: March 2025, June 2025.

In 2023, MHCLG launched the Rough Sleeping Data Framework (RSDF) to compliment the annual snapshot and provide more regular data on the number and profile of rough sleepers.

Across all indicators included in the RSDF, there has been a rising trend in the numbers of people rough sleeping. The trend over time can be seen in Figure 7.

Figure 7: Estimated number of people sleeping rough over the course of a month



Source: CSJ analysis of MHCLG, Rough Sleeping Data Framework March 2025, June 2025.

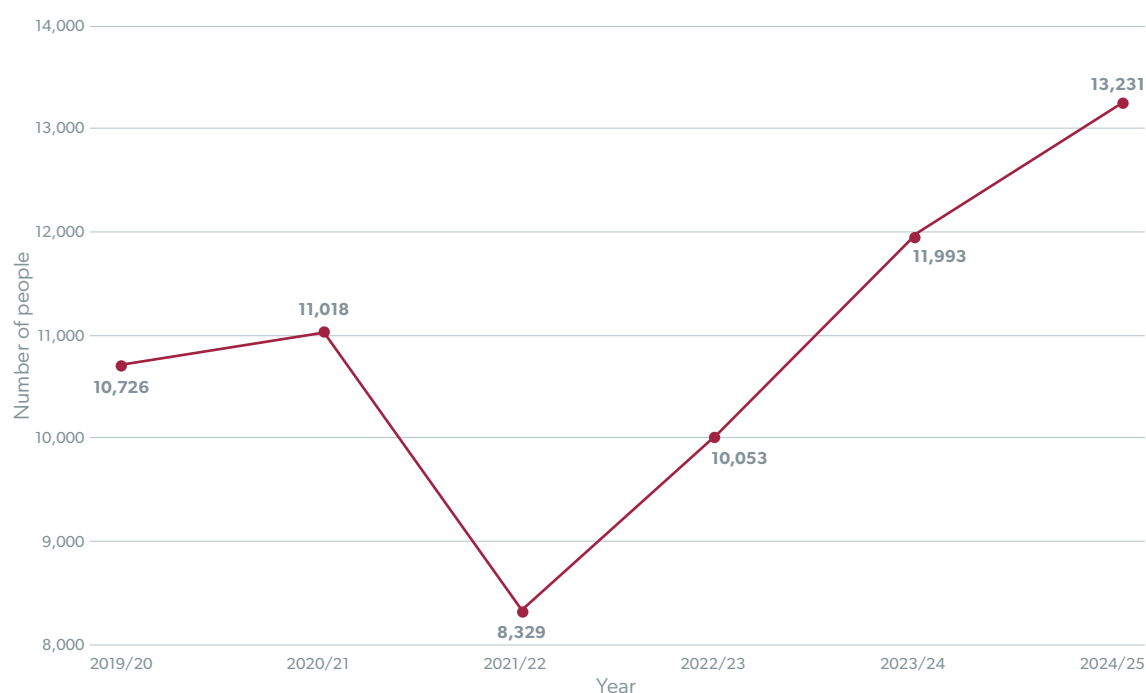
Figure 7 shows:

- › A 94 per cent increase in the number of people sleeping rough over the course of the month, from March 2021 to March 2025.
- › A 52 per cent increase in the number of people sleeping rough over the course of the month who are new to rough sleeping, from March 2021 to March 2025.
- › An 11 per cent increase in the number of people sleeping rough long term over the course of the month, from March 2024 to March 2025.
- › A six per cent increase in the number of people returning to rough sleeping over the course of the month, from March 2024 to March 2025.

Although the RSDF has added to the national evidence base on rough sleeping, the most robust and detailed dataset is commissioned by the Greater London Authority (GLA). The Combined Homelessness and Information Network (CHAIN) represents the UK's most detailed and comprehensive source of information about rough sleeping.

As in the rest of the country, CHAIN data shows that rough sleeping has increased in London. In addition to single night and monthly estimates, CHAIN provides an annual count of individuals seen sleeping rough in the capital. In 2024/25, CHAIN recorded a total of 13,231 people sleeping rough in London over the course of the year, the highest number since records began, representing a 10 per cent increase since 2023/24 and a 59 per cent increase since 2021/22.

Figure 8: Number of people seen rough sleeping in London over the course of a year



Source: CSJ analysis of GLA, CHAIN Annual Data Tables 2024/25, June 2025.

CHAIN data indicates that the national figure for the total number of people seen sleeping rough over the course of a year is significantly higher than the 4,667 identified sleeping rough on a single night in October 2024. For example, MHCLG indicated that 28 per cent of people sleeping rough on a single night were in London,²⁴ if this percentage was extrapolated to a total yearly figure, based on the last count of rough sleepers in London from 2024/25, this could indicate around 47,250 people slept rough across England over the last year.²⁵

The profile and support needs of rough sleepers

National data from MHCLG provides information about the characteristics of people sleeping rough in England. The following bullet points outline key demographics from the latest annual snapshot.²⁶ These figures only account for people sleeping rough on a single night in Autumn 2024.

Sex: The vast majority of people sleeping rough in England are male (83 per cent) compared to 15 per cent who are female

Age: The vast majority of people sleeping rough in England are over the age of 26 (86 per cent), with five per cent between the age of 18-25

Nationality: Non-UK citizens are significantly overrepresented in rough sleeping statistics, 27 per cent of people sleeping rough in England had a non-UK nationality, compared to roughly 11 per cent of the population of England who are non-UK nationals²⁷

²⁴ Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, Rough sleeping snapshot in England: autumn 2024, February 2025.

²⁵ Data from the annual snapshot indicates that 28 per cent of rough sleepers across England were counted in London. Assuming this regional proportion is also true of the total yearly count, and resembled 13,231 rough sleepers, then the total rough sleeping count across England could be 47,250. 28 per cent of 47,250 = 13,230.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ CSJ analysis of 2024 Annual Population Survey via Nomis.

Although the annual snapshot gives a broad demographic picture of the rough sleeper population on a single night, the data does not provide a detailed depiction of the backgrounds and support needs of rough sleepers.

To understand this better, in 2020, MHCLG commissioned a study into the support needs and experiences of people sleeping rough in England. This included a survey of 563 respondents, all who had slept rough within the year of survey taking place. It identified that:²⁸

- › 77 per cent of respondents had stayed in some form of short-term homeless accommodation in the last year, showing the high degree to which people flow in and out of temporary shelters and hostels back onto the streets
- › 91 per cent of respondents had at least two vulnerability or support needs (physical health need, mental health vulnerability, recent victim of crime, substance misuse, prison, domestic abuse)
- › 35 per cent had developed drug dependencies by the age of 16. 60 per cent reported a current dependency
- › 20 per cent had been convicted of a crime in the last year
- › 75 per cent had reported previously going to a local authority for help with housing

One limitation of this analysis is a lack of data collected on the impact of adverse childhood experiences and experiences of family life on rough sleeping. Previous CSJ analysis has identified that those who experience family breakdown are over twice as likely (2.3 times) to experience homelessness as an adult.²⁹

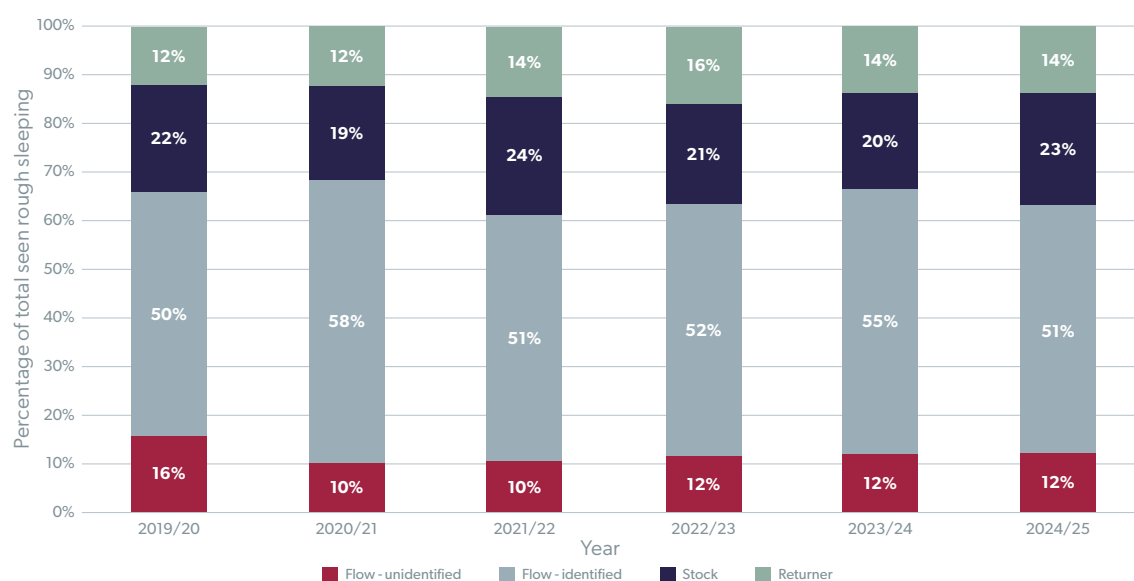
Data from CHAIN provides a more detailed breakdown than MHCLG of rough sleeper support needs in London, as well as the flow of people on and off the streets. New rough sleepers (flow) made up over half of the total number of people seen sleeping rough in London (63 per cent) in 2024/25. The next highest group were those who had been seen sleeping rough for two consecutive years (stock, 23 per cent). 14 per cent were seen sleeping rough prior to the reporting year but not the previous year (returner). The proportions over time have remained fairly consistent. However, there has been a 27 per cent increase since 2023/24 in the number of people seen sleeping rough for the second year in a row (stock). The full categories of people sleeping rough within London can be seen below in Figure 9. The definitions are footnoted here.³⁰

28 Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, Understanding the Multiple Vulnerabilities, Support Needs and Experiences of People who Sleep Rough in England, December 2020, pp. 6-8.

29 Centre for Social Justice, Why Family Matters: A comprehensive analysis of the consequences of family breakdown, March 2029, p. 5.

30 Flow unidentified: People who had never been seen rough sleeping prior to the reporting year (i.e. new rough sleepers), who had been recorded without a name, and with only one contact during the year. Flow – identified: People who had never been seen rough sleeping prior to the reporting year (i.e. new rough sleepers), who had been recorded with a name, and/or with more than one contact during the year. Stock: People who were also seen rough sleeping in the previous year (i.e. those seen across a minimum of two consecutive years). Returner: People who were first seen rough sleeping prior to the reporting year, but who were not seen during the previous year (i.e. those who have had a gap in their rough sleeping histories).

Figure 9: Category of people seen sleeping rough in London



Source: CSJ analysis of GLA, CHAIN Annual Data Tables 2024/25, June 2025.

Whilst the majority of people sleeping rough each year in London have not been seen before, there is a large minority (nearly one in four) who are long-term rough sleepers over at least two years, whilst 14 per cent have returned to rough sleeping.

Data from CHAIN also shows that there is a need for housing pathways that can offer long-term accommodation options. Out of the 8,994 individuals who had a housing outcome in 2024/25, just 11 per cent were able to access long-term accommodation. The remainder were housed either in temporary accommodation or homeless hubs, shelters and emergency housing.³¹

CHAIN data also provides information on the support needs of those seen rough sleeping.³² In 2024/25:

- › One in five (20 per cent) had alcohol support needs
- › Nearly one in four (23 per cent) had drug support needs
- › Over one third (36 per cent) had mental health support needs
- › Nearly one in four (24 per cent) had more than one of alcohol, drugs and mental health support needs
- › A minority (seven per cent) had a combination of alcohol, drugs and mental health support needs

These statistics show the high degree of multiple and complex challenges within the rough sleeping population in London, with a sub-set of seven per cent with the most multiple and complex support needs. People whose homelessness is compounded by past trauma, mental health conditions or substance misuse are likely to need tailored support to resolve their homelessness and sustain long term housing. The prevalence of multiple and complex challenges and lack of long-term housing outcomes suggests that a number of rough sleepers would benefit from a Housing First intervention. Because Housing First is not available to the majority of rough sleepers, this data suggests that the government should also focus investment on improving the quality of hostel accommodation to better tailor support to individual's needs, as well as improving access to long-term housing.

³¹ CSJ analysis of Greater London Authority, CHAIN Annual Data Tables 2024/25, June 2025.

³² Ibid.

Migration and homelessness

Changes in post-Brexit migration

Non-UK nationals are overrepresented among the number of people sleeping rough in England. Particularly since 2021/22, the increase in the number of people from non-European Union (EU) countries sleeping rough has contributed to a surge in numbers. Data from the rough sleeping snapshot indicates that the number of people with non-EU nationalities sleeping rough on a single night increased by 350 per cent from 2021 to 2024.³³ Furthermore, whilst the number of UK nationals sleeping rough has fallen by 13 per cent since the high watermark recorded in 2017, the number of non-UK nationals sleeping rough increased by 32 per cent, along with a 12 per cent rise in the number of people with unknown nationalities.³⁴

Table 1 shows the year-to-year percentage change in the number of UK, EU, non-EU and not known nationalities sleeping rough on a single night. Since 2021/22, the rate of increase year-to-year has been notably greater among non-EU rough sleepers than those from the UK and EU. Whilst the number of non-EU rough sleepers was falling year on year between 2017 and 2021, it is notable just how rapid the increase has been since the COVID-19 pandemic. This increase reflects the change in migration patterns post-Brexit, when non-EU overtook EU migration.³⁵

Table 1: Percentage change in UK, EU, non-EU and not known nationalities sleeping rough in England

Year-to-year	UK (%)	EU (%)	Non-EU (%)	Not known (%)
2017 to 2018	-11	38	-21	15
2018 to 2019	-9	-11	-1	-4
2019 to 2020	-30	-50	-15	-63
2020 to 2021	-15	5	-14	22
2021 to 2022	20	27	63	44
2022 to 2023	23	14	88	45
2023 to 2024	22	7	47	6

Source: CSJ analysis of MHCLG, Rough sleeping snapshot in England: autumn 2024, February 2025.

Figure 10 shows the same data from Table 1 for the years following the COVID-19 pandemic. It is notable that the most significant yearly increase in people sleeping rough with non-EU nationalities occurred from 2022 to 2023, the same year that net-migration peaked at a record 906,000.³⁶ As overall migration rose to an unprecedented level in 2022/23, this was accompanied by an upward trend in rough sleeping, particularly among non-UK nationals.

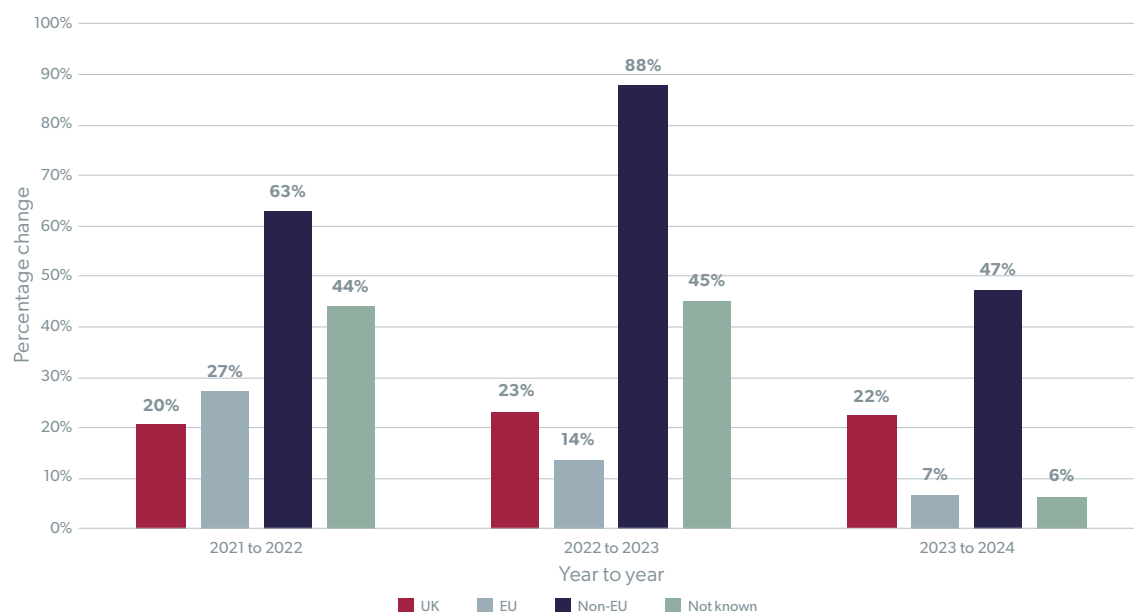
33 CSJ analysis of Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, Rough sleeping snapshot in England: autumn 2024, February 2025.

34 Ibid.

35 The Migration Observatory, Net migration to the UK, June 2025. Accessed: <https://migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/resources/briefings/long-term-international-migration-flows-to-and-from-the-uk/>.

36 Ibid.

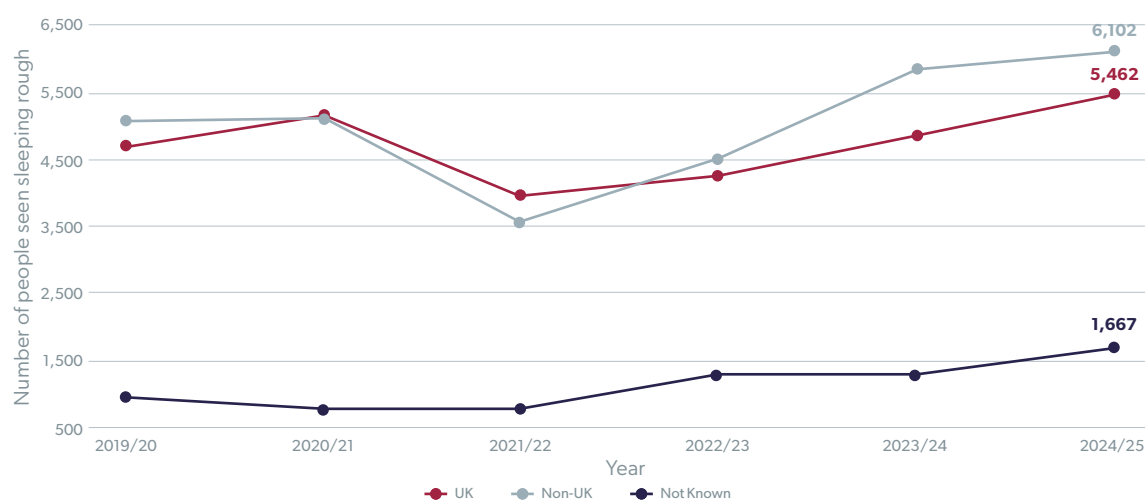
Figure 10: Percentage change in UK, EU, non-EU and not known nationalities sleeping rough in England, 2021 to 2024



Source: CSJ analysis of MHCLG, Rough sleeping snapshot in England: autumn 2024, February 2025.

The prevalence of non-UK national rough sleeping is particularly acute in London, where the number of non-UK rough sleepers have outnumbered UK nationals since before 2020/21, with a brief reversal during the COVID-19 pandemic, as shown below in Figure 11. There has also been a steady increase in the number of people who have not declared their nationality from 954 in 2019/20 to 1,667 in 2024/25. The most common countries of origin for non-UK rough sleepers in London were Romania, Eritrea and Poland.³⁷

Figure 11: Nationality of people sleeping rough in London

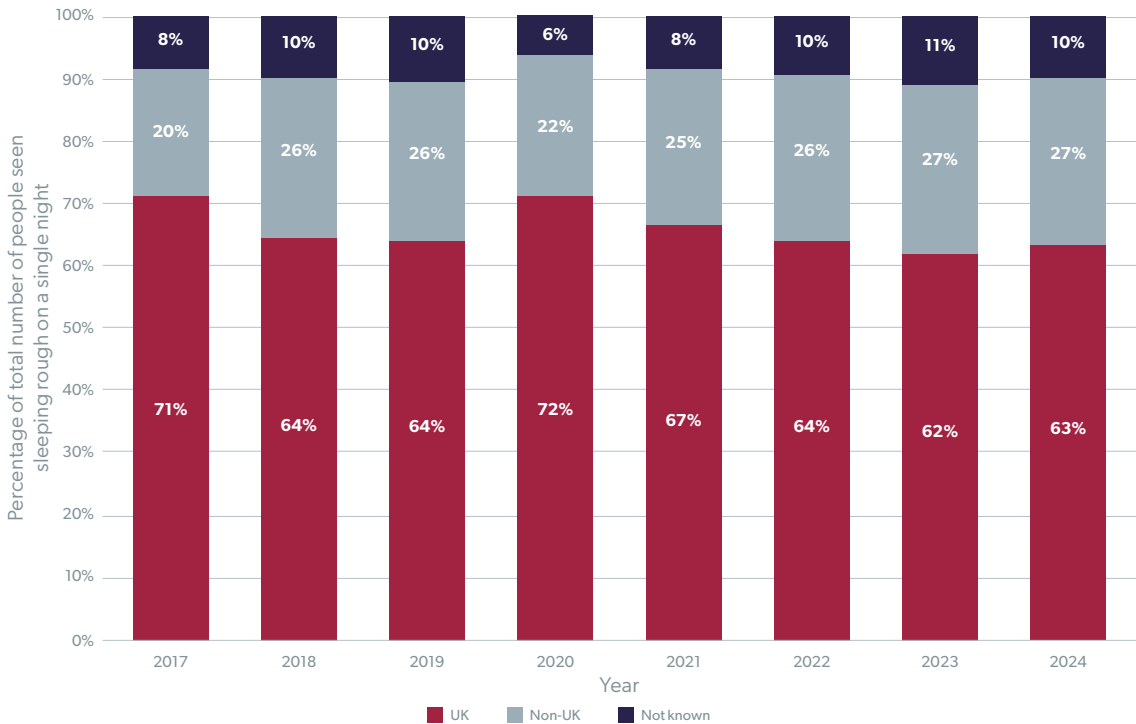


Source: CSJ analysis of GLA, CHAIN Annual Data Tables 2024/25, June 2025.

37 CSJ analysis of Greater London Authority, CHAIN Annual Data Tables 2024/25, June 2025.

As the number of non-UK rough sleepers has increased, the proportion of the total rough sleeping population who are British has steadily fallen, from 71 per cent in 2017 to 63 per cent in 2024. Figure 12 shows the proportion of the total rough sleeping population in the 2024 annual snapshot split by those with a UK, non-UK or not known nationality. The proportion of individuals sleeping rough who are not from the UK has increased from 20 per cent in 2017 to 27 per cent in 2024.

Figure 12: Proportion of UK and non-UK rough sleepers as a percentage of total



Source: CSJ analysis of MHCLG, Rough sleeping snapshot in England: autumn 2024, February 2025.

The increase as a proportion of total rough sleepers of those with a non-UK/not known nationality may also partly reflect the impact of the *Homeless Reduction Act 2017*. The Act constituted a significant change to the support available for people at risk of rough sleeping, and was found to have had some positive effects.³⁸ However, for individuals not from the UK who have no recourse to public funds, the support available is limited.³⁹

Although organisations in the homelessness sector have consistently highlighted the issue of migrant homelessness to the government, the primary response has often been to remove the distinction between migrants and UK nationals, extending equal entitlements to all individuals presenting as homeless.

Whilst there will be exceptional circumstances, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, where support should be extended to those with no recourse to public funds, government policy should prioritise resolving the immigration status of non-UK nationals who are sleeping rough. Where appropriate, support should be available to facilitate a return to an individual’s country of origin. Those who have had their asylum claim rejected, have overstayed their visa, or who are in the UK unlawfully should be required to return. This approach is not only fair to taxpayers and essential to maintaining trust in the immigration and asylum system, but also vital to sustaining public support for efforts to end rough sleeping and homelessness.

38 Crisis, *A Food in the Door: Experiences of the Homelessness Reduction Act*, March 2020, p. 7.

39 Ibid, p. 27.

A change of government

The legacy of the 2019-2024 Conservative government

Significant progress was made to tackle rough sleeping during the COVID-19 pandemic, primarily due to the success of 'Everyone In', which saw at least 37,000 who were or at risk of rough sleeping housed in safe and secure accommodation.⁴⁰

In 2022, the last government published *Ending Rough Sleeping for Good*, setting out the ambitious goal of ending rough sleeping by 2025. The strategy strengthened data collection through the launch of the RSDF, extended the Rough Sleeping Initiative (RSI), and crucially put it on a multi-year footing for the first time. This proved vital for existing Housing First services, allowing them to consolidate across England with the guarantee of multi-year funding. The strategy also committed to repealing the *Vagrancy Act 1824*, which criminalises rough sleeping and begging.

Whilst the strategy was broadly welcomed by local authorities, charities, and homelessness organisations, many warned that even good policy would struggle to withstand the pressures of rising living costs, stagnant wages, housing insecurity, and the wider fallout from COVID-19 and the economic disruption that followed.⁴¹ Ultimately, the effectiveness of policies which increase access to support depend on whether the level of need remains manageable.

By 2024, the National Audit Office concluded that the then Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, was failing to deliver value for money in its approach to tackling homelessness. Fragmented funding pots, a shortage in affordable housing, failure to meet housing targets, and lack of a strategy to tackle statutory homelessness had left ministers falling short of their targets to reduce homelessness and end rough sleeping.⁴²

Whilst the previous government strengthened the policy framework that makes provision for supporting people experiencing homelessness, the root causes of homelessness and rough sleeping were not addressed. The Kerslake Commission on Homelessness and Rough Sleeping, established to learn the lessons of the COVID-19 response, argued that the government could not make progress to end homelessness due to unresolved systematic issues which leave the UK particularly exposed to rising levels of homelessness. These include a severe housing affordability crisis, a chronic undersupply of social rented homes, cost-of-living pressures impacted by record inflation in recent years and an increase in migration.⁴³

40 HL Deb 2nd March 2021, vol 810, cols 1085. Accessed: <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Lords/2021-03-02/debates/6FCC3F42-B14A-4DD5-BAAE-83C7E1B06892/RoughSleeping#contribution-BF4BBFCB-25A7-412E-BDF0-536DE094BF2C>.

41 House of Commons Library, *Rough sleeping in England: Local and national government action*, January 2025, p. 32.

42 National Audit Office, *The effectiveness of government in tackling homelessness*, July 2024, p. 12.

43 The Kerslake Commission on Homelessness and Rough Sleeping, *Turning the Tide on Rising Homelessness and Rough Sleeping*, September 2023, pp. 29-30.

The 2024- Labour government

Whilst the Labour government has inherited a robust policy framework, it also faces an extremely challenging economic and social landscape which threatens to undermine its manifesto commitment to put Britain back on track to ending homelessness.⁴⁴ These challenges include historic underinvestment in affordable housing, limited fiscal headroom due to high public debt, over a decade of local authority cuts, and unprecedented levels of migration to the UK.

Soon after the government formed in July 2024, a new cross-government Inter-Ministerial Group on Homelessness and Rough Sleeping was created, which has led on developing a new homelessness strategy, expected in the Autumn.

In the 2024 Autumn Budget, the government committed £233 million of additional spending in 2025/26 for homelessness,⁴⁵ and in December 2024, announced that funding for rough sleeping and single homelessness would be merged into the new RSPARG.⁴⁶ The Spending Review in June 2025 protected spending on homelessness and rough sleeping, as well as committed £100 million from the Transformation Fund for early interventions.⁴⁷ Further details on funding allocations are expected in the forthcoming homelessness strategy.

The government has also announced plans to repeal the *Vagrancy Act 1824* by Spring next year, continuing a pledge made by the last government. Although the government is right to state that people forced into rough sleeping should not be criminalised, it is rare that the Act is used in this way. There is a risk that intentional rough sleeping is encouraged by the repeal of the Act, and the government must ensure that the police are given adequate powers to dismantle rough sleeping encampments when an accommodation offer has been made.

44 The Labour Party, *Change: Labour Party Manifesto 2024*, June 2024, p. 80.

45 HM Treasury, *Autumn Budget 2024: Fixing the Foundations to Deliver Change*, October 2024, p. 92.

46 Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, *Largest ever cash boost to turn the tide on homelessness*, December 2024. Accessed: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/largest-ever-cash-boost-to-turn-the-tide-on-homelessness>.

47 HM Treasury, *Spending Review 2025*, June 2025, p. 16.

Chapter two:

Housing First and Its Place in the Homelessness System

In this chapter we outline what Housing First is and examine the evidence that shows it is an effective intervention to end homelessness for people who also have multiple and complex challenges. We show how Housing First is different to other approaches to tackling homelessness and explore why its effectiveness is linked to the guiding principles which shape its delivery.

We also include reference to the impact of the *Renters Rights Bill* on Housing First delivery, as well as contemporary criticism of Housing First which has been made by organisations in the United States (US).

What is Housing First and who is it for?

The principles of Housing First

Housing First provides ordinary settled housing alongside intensive, person-centred support for people whose homelessness is compounded by multiple and complex support needs. Housing First is different from conventional interventions as it offers permanent housing without conditions, other than an individual's willingness to maintain a tenancy.

Housing First services consist of two essential components: housing and support. Tenancies on Housing First are usually provided through social housing, although some services make use of the private rented sector (PRS). Housing should be permanent and mainstream. Critically, the support element of Housing First should be open-ended, proactive, trauma informed (meaning staff should be trained in understanding the impact of trauma on a person) and designed so that it can be scaled up and down. Staff should have a maximum caseload of six service users to provide the intensity of support required. In comparison, a floating tenancy support worker might have a caseload of between 20-40 people. This also means that the service is not suitable for every homeless person, particularly for those who have less complex support needs or for people who are not at risk of rough sleeping.

The intensity of support is designed to support a service user cohort who experience additional multiple and complex challenges and disadvantages, such as severe mental illness, drug or alcohol misuse and a history of criminal offending. This means that Housing First is not solely a response to homelessness, but forms a package of support like an adult social care intervention.

In the past, similar interventions to Housing First were provided by the Supporting People programme, which intended to help vulnerable people live independently.

Supporting People was introduced by the last Labour government in 2003 and ringfenced.⁴⁸ Experts told us that when the programme lost its ringfence in 2009, funds were used to support other expenditure across local authorities and many vulnerable homeless people lost critical housing related support.

Despite the similarity with previous initiatives like Supporting People, Housing First has mainly been delivered as a response to entrenched rough sleeping, with funding drawn from central government homelessness programmes such as the RSI, the Single Homelessness Accommodation Programme (SHAP), and the Rough Sleeping Accommodation Programme (RSAP).

Whilst Housing First is typically targeted at people who have histories of entrenched or repeat rough sleeping, it can also be used preventively. Housing First has been used to support other service user groups, such as young people at risk of homelessness and survivors of domestic abuse.⁴⁹

Housing First has been developed with seven specific principles in mind. Evidence suggests that services with higher fidelity to these principles achieve better outcomes for their service users.⁵⁰

The Principles of Housing First

People have a right to a home

- Access to permanent housing is provided as quickly as possible
- Eligibility for housing is not contingent on any conditions other than willingness to maintain a tenancy
- The individual will have a tenancy agreement, and will not lose their home if they disengage or no longer need support

Flexible support is provided for as long as it is needed

- The offer of support is open ended
- The service is designed for flexibility in intensity of support
- The support links with relevant services across sectors that help to fulfil an individual's needs

Housing and support are separate

- Support is available to help people maintain a tenancy and address any other needs they have
- Housing is not conditional on engaging with support
- The offer of support stays with the individual, if the tenancy fails, the individual is supported to access and maintain a new home

48 House of Commons Library, The Supporting People programme, July 2012.

49 Centre for Social Justice, Home for Good: Housing First for domestic abuse survivors, February 2023.

50 Davidson, C., et al., "Association of housing first implementation and key outcomes among homeless persons with problematic substance use", *Psychiatric Services*, 1:65 (November 2014), pp. 1318-1324.

Individuals have choice and control

- There is choice about the type and location of housing, within reason as defined by the context
- There is choice about whether or not to engage with other services, and about where, when, and how support is provided by the Housing First team
- Support is person-centred and shaped by the person

An active engagement approach is used

- Staff are responsible for proactively engaging their service users
- Caseloads are small, ideally a maximum of six service users per support worker

The service is based on people's strengths, goals and aspirations

- Services are underpinned by a philosophy that there is always a possibility for positive change and improved health and wellbeing
- Individuals are supported to identify their strengths and goals, and to develop the skills they need to achieve these
- Individuals are supported to integrate into their local community

A harm reduction approach is used

- Staff support individuals who use substances to reduce immediate and ongoing harm to their health
- Staff aim to support individuals who self-harm to minimise risk of greater harm
- Staff aim to promote recovery in other areas of physical and mental health and wellbeing

In England, Housing First services have usually been aimed at people who have been unable to sustain or access permanent housing through conventional homelessness services. Experiences of revolving in and out of homeless accommodation often comes with experience of prison, exclusion from services and ineligibility for social housing.

Housing First challenges traditional conceptions of who is eligible for permanent housing and how support is provided. This means it takes time for Housing First services to develop and consolidate in localities. For example, the evaluation of the national pilots in England highlighted how the services struggled to achieve wholesale 'systems change.' Housing First operates in contrast to rigid, stretched, bureaucratic processes governing local authorities and statutory services.⁵¹

51 Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, Evaluation of the Housing First Pilots: Final synthesis report, October 2024, p. 45.

The difference between Housing First and other rough sleeping interventions

Housing First operates differently to conventional responses to homelessness and rough sleeping. The latter is often provided through temporary accommodation, hostels, supported accommodation and night shelters. Whilst these pathways help many people to access permanent housing, they do not work for everyone. For example, analysis by the Centre for Homelessness Impact has found that the majority of hostels (67 per cent) see up to one in five (11-20 per cent) residents experience a negative move-on through an unplanned departure or being required to leave.⁵²

Conventional support for rough sleepers usually takes the form of a 'treatment first' approach. This means that individuals are expected to engage with treatment or support before 'staircasing' up to accessing permanent housing. This is also known as demonstrating 'tenancy readiness.'

Conventional housing options for people who are homeless or rough sleeping

Temporary accommodation is sometimes provided to people experiencing homelessness. Temporary accommodation may include various types of shelter, such as housing owned and managed by local authorities, hostels, hotels, or flats and houses rented through a private landlord.

Supported housing combines accommodation with other services, such as for health, substance misuse and employment issues. Supported housing can be provided in the short or long term.

Hostels for rough sleepers are designed to provide short-term accommodation, usually for up to two years depending on available move-on housing. Hostels often have rules that residents have to sign up to, for example, guest access and the use of alcohol and drugs.

Shelters are a basic form of temporary accommodation where a bed is provided in a shared space overnight. One of the key features of a homeless shelter is that it is transitional and an option for people who are not yet eligible for more stable accommodation. Homeless shelters are used to quickly deal with emergency situations such as adverse weather conditions or domestic abuse.

Source: Centre for Homelessness Impact, Intervention Tool.⁵³

Whilst Housing First should complement the conventional pathways outlined above, there is evidence to suggest that interventions which provide unconditional access to accommodation for people with high support needs achieve better outcomes than services with similar levels of support, but with conditions attached (e.g. 'treatment first').⁵⁴ This is not to say that 'treatment first' or abstinence based housing options do not work, but that a variety of services are required to adequately meet the diversity of needs among rough sleepers.

52 Centre for Homelessness Impact, What is a Hostel in 21st Century Britain, February 2025, p. 35.

53 Centre for Homelessness Impact, Intervention Tool, n.d. Accessed: <https://www.homelessnessimpact.org/intervention-tool>.

54 Keenan, C., et al., "Accommodation-based interventions for individuals experiencing, or at risk of experiencing, homelessness," Campbell Systematic Reviews, 17:2 (June 2021), e1165.

There are some scenarios when a Housing First intervention would suit a person better. There are some people who will not secure long-term housing through conventional housing pathways. A recent UK study looking at the health and care needs of people living in homeless hostels found that nine per cent of clients had needs too high for the services, with scarce move-on options.⁵⁵ This is why Housing First is needed as a targeted intervention for a smaller sub-group of homeless people whose homelessness and/or rough sleeping persists, even after a conventional intervention.

Furthermore, for individuals wanting to recover from problems like addiction, hostels and other conventional housing services can trigger unbearable stress. Anti-social and dangerous behaviour encountered within some hostels, as well as the lack of control and agency, can cause some people to return to the streets. Evidence suggests that 'hostel' avoidance, or a voluntary return to rough sleeping, can be understood as a rational response to living in an environment which causes intolerable levels of stress for some individuals.⁵⁶

"Living in a hostel is a bad thing, you have people around you that you don't want around you." [sic]

Housing First service user at a roundtable hosted by the CSJ

Furthermore, analysis by the Centre for Homelessness Impact has found that for many hostel residents, if not most, a hostel stay is often not the final step on a pathway to permanent housing. 39 per cent of hostels say that over one in five (21 per cent) residents move to a different emergency or temporary housing option, whilst 28 per cent say that over one in five (21 per cent) residents experience a negative movement (evicted or abandoning the hostel). 62 per cent of hostels say that over 31 per cent of residents move onto a positive housing outcome.⁵⁷

"You know that must be cheaper to get someone into their own home than have them rotting away in a hostel and surrounded by, you know, I mean, there was rats at the end of my bed chewing on my hair." [sic]

Housing First service user at a roundtable hosted by the CSJ

At a visit to the Moses Project, an addiction recovery charity in Stockton-on-Tees, a young man shared how the charity provided a welcome respite from his hostel. He recounted how, after completing a residential drug rehabilitation programme, the council placed him in hostel accommodation. Upon his return to the hostel, he was immediately approached by a drug dealer who asked, "When are you starting [using drugs] again?" Despite the significant public investment in his rehabilitation, he reflected, "I was set up to fail" by the conditions of hostel accommodation.

55 Shulman, C., et-al., "People living in homeless hostels: a survey of health and care needs", *Clinical Medicine*, 23:4 (July 2023), pp. 387-394.

56 McMordie, L., "Avoidance strategies: stress, appraisal and coping in hostel accommodation", *Housing Studies*, 36:3 (July 2019), pp. 380-396.

57 Centre for Homelessness Impact, *What is a Hostel in 21st Century Britain*, February 2025, p. 35.

"I've had to try and sort myself out. About three or four months ago, I knew of the Moses [Project] but I hadn't come. I came the odd Thursday night. But I started coming about three or four months ago. It's been brilliant, brilliant. It's a break away from [my] hostel. It's horrible [the hostel], it really is horrible. It comes up to your pay day and half the hostel has your pay day written down. This is my break away, I come away from that, and this is my break away." [sic]

Service User, Moses Project, Stockton-on-Tees⁵⁸

The history of Housing First and its adoption in England

Housing First was developed by Pathways to Housing in New York in the early 1990s as a mental health and housing intervention designed to improve outcomes among individuals with mental disorders who were rough sleeping or homeless.⁵⁹ Pathways Housing First reversed the conventional approach to housing people with complex challenges and offered independent scattered housing alongside wraparound community treatment and support.

The original US workforce was made up of practitioners from a mental health background, whereas in the UK, Housing First has been predominately implemented as a housing intervention which draws on a different pool of trained professionals. Whilst there is a wealth of international evidence demonstrating that Housing First is an effective intervention, there are inherent 'translation' difficulties in using evidence focused on a particular model in time (e.g. New York in the 1990s) to justify policy interventions in the UK.⁶⁰

A number of other countries and cities have moved from piloting Housing First to rolling it out as a mainstream intervention, including within the UK in Scotland and Wales. Finland has often been referenced as a case study of how to integrate Housing First into a national strategy to end rough sleeping.

Case Study: Housing First in Scotland, Wales and Finland

Scotland

Scotland has a strong legislative and policy framework to address homelessness but lacks the delivery capacity to fully implement it. The *Homelessness etc. (Scotland) Act 2003* outlined that anyone finding themselves homeless through no fault of their own must be entitled to settled accommodation. Whilst the aspirations of the Act are to be commended, the realities of a national housing shortage severely hamper its implementation. In May 2024, the Scottish Government declared a housing emergency.⁶¹ As of November 2024, twelve Scottish councils had also declared a local housing emergency.⁶²

58 The Centre for Social Justice, *Two Nations: The state of poverty in the UK*, December 2023, p. 171.

59 Tsemberis, S., et al., "Pathways to housing: supported housing for street-dwelling homeless individuals with psychiatric disabilities," *Psychiatric Services*, 51:4 (April 2000), pp. 487-493.

60 Expert evidence provided to the CSJ.

61 Scottish Government, *Ending homelessness together: annual report to the Scottish Parliament*, November 2024.

62 Chartered Institute of Housing Scotland, *The Housing Emergency: Response submitted to the Scottish Parliament*, November 2024, p. 2.

In the 2018 homelessness strategy, *Ending Homelessness Together*, the Scottish Government promised to achieve a fundamental shift to rapid rehousing, including Housing First.⁶³ Rapid rehousing is an approach that places those who are experiencing homelessness into accommodation as soon as possible.⁶⁴ The strategy contained an ambition that Housing First would become the default response to homelessness for everyone with high and complex support needs. Whilst pathfinder projects were launched as part of the shift towards Housing First, the government asked councils to produce rapid rehousing transition plans including plans for Housing First provision.⁶⁵

Homeless Network Scotland publishes an annual check-up of Housing First, alongside monitoring by the Scottish Government. Whilst there is no formal accreditation process for Housing First services, the guidance has been described as strong, with a heavy expectation that local authorities should deliver the programme. Benefits of this flexible approach means that local authorities buy into the service. There is no legal duty to engage or run a certain type of Housing First service. Data from 2024 indicates that there are a total of 2,040 Housing First places in Scotland, with 27 local authorities delivering a Housing First service.⁶⁶ Tenancy sustainment rates are at 85 per cent over 12 months after entry.⁶⁷ Whilst this is good progress, the most recent check-up report outlined challenges with scaling up to meet actual demand, a lack of housing supply, cross-disciplinary commissioning and partnership, alongside recruitment and staffing pressures.⁶⁸

Wales

In Wales, Housing First has been adopted as a core element of the nation's homelessness strategy. The *Ending Homelessness in Wales* strategy, published in 2021, expected that Housing First, alongside other options, would form a key part of local authorities rapid rehousing approaches and should be the default approach for those who have high support needs.⁶⁹ This strategy came alongside £1.9 million for a Housing First programme.⁷⁰ Prior to this, Cymorth Cymru, the representative body for the homelessness sector in Wales, established the Housing First Wales Network in 2018 and co-produced the Housing First principles for Wales. Unique to Wales is a formal accreditation process for Housing First services, which aims to embed a high-fidelity approach to running the service.

Finland

Finland has been the archetypal case study of a country putting Housing First at the heart of its strategy to end rough sleeping. Finland first adopted Housing First in 2008 and has made significant progress towards ending rough sleeping since. Whilst Housing First is central to the Finnish approach to tackling rough sleeping, it existed within a wider long-term strategy where other initiatives also played a part. Crucially, scaling up Housing First in Finland involved the conversion, purchase and building of additional housing as affordable housing supply was insufficient to enable a genuine attempt to reduce levels of rough sleeping.⁷¹ Many of these units were congregate Housing First services.⁷²

A further factor supporting the success of the national programme has been political consensus about the programme's objectives, methods and cost-benefits. This has been critical to its longevity and impact.

63 Scottish Government, *Ending Homelessness Together: High Level Action Plan*, November 2018, p. 25.

64 Centre for Homelessness Impact, *Intervention Tool: Rapid Rehousing*, n.d. Accessed: <https://www.homelessnessimpact.org/intervention/rapid-rehousing>.

65 Scottish Government, *Ending Homelessness Together: High Level Action Plan*, November 2018, p. 27.

66 Scottish Government, *Housing First: monitoring reports*, February 2025. Accessed: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/housing-first-monitoring-reports/pages/1-april-2024-to-30-september-2024/>.

67 Ibid.

68 Homeless Network Scotland, *Housing First Scotland: Annual Check-up 2023*, March 2024, pp. 6-7.

69 Welsh Government, *Ending Homelessness in Wales: A high level action plan 2021-2026*, November 2021, p. 12.

70 Ibid, p. 13.

71 University of York, *Using Housing First in Integrated Homelessness Strategies*, November 2018, p. 34.

72 Y-Foundation, *A Home of Your Own: Housing First and ending homelessness in Finland*, 2017, pp. 70-73.

The original Pathways Housing First included the direct provision of treatment and rehabilitation services conducted by a multi-disciplinary team, known as Assertive Community Treatment (ACT), as well as an Intensive Case Management (ICM) approach to connecting people to services provided by other agencies.

Definitions

Assertive Community Treatment: A comprehensive support model where a dedicated team of professionals, including mental and physical health workers, proactively delivers wraparound services in the community, rather than expecting clients to visit traditional service settings.

Intensive Case Management: A support model in which support workers provide direct support to Housing First service users whilst connecting people to mainstream specialist health and treatment services provided by other agencies.

The model as applied in England typically relies solely on an ICM approach. 55.6 per cent of respondents to a 2023 survey of Housing First services conducted by Homeless Link adopted a ICM approach, no services operated an ACT approach.⁷³

This reflects differences in English public service provision compared to the US (e.g. the NHS free at the point of use). However, some Housing First programmes in England lean on elements of the ACT model, with Greater Manchester and Liverpool City Region Housing First having employed the services of clinical mental health professionals.⁷⁴ Similarly, other services, such as one run by Centrepoin in Lambeth, have access to a dedicated mental health team that includes three clinical psychologists and two psychotherapists. This team provides flexible and evidence-based mental health care and talking therapies to young people on the Housing First programme and other housing pathways.⁷⁵

Another adaptation of the Housing First model in England has been described as 'Intensive Case Management plus', where Housing First teams are able to draw on enhanced support from coordinated services. Nearly one in four (22.2 per cent) respondents to the Homeless Link survey operated an ICM plus approach.⁷⁶ This often happens when Housing First works with other programmes that offer enhanced access to public services.

Whilst some Housing First services benefit from enhanced access to public services, this is not the case in all areas. Matter South Yorkshire, a CIC providing trauma informed interventions in the homelessness sector, told us that in their experience, many Housing First services have limited access to mental health services. They explained how Housing First services they had supported lacked effective referral pathways. Often, a diagnosis will occur alongside a prescription, but limited long-term support is available to help people make a full recovery.

⁷³ Homeless Link, *More Than a Roof: Exploring the holistic outcomes of Housing First*, January 2024, p. 22.

⁷⁴ Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, *Evaluation of the Housing First Pilots: Final synthesis report*, October 2024, pp. 13-14.

⁷⁵ Evidence provided to the CSJ by Centrepoin.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

This can result in a lack of access to non-housing related support, which undermines the effectiveness of Housing First across a range of different areas for service users, and as a broader health and social care pathway at a systems level.

Prior to the national pilots, Housing First in England had been limited to several predominately small-scale projects.⁷⁷ Experts told us that in recent years, services had been stable, mainly due to the multi-year RSI. However, a lack of commitment to long-term funding meant Housing First services were unlikely to significantly expand provision.

Ahead of the 2024 General Election it was reported that Labour was considering a national Housing First programme as part of their core policy offer on homelessness.⁷⁸ Despite not being mentioned in their manifesto, Housing First has been mentioned explicitly in government announcements as a service which local authorities can choose to invest money in.⁷⁹

In recent years the government has funded the development of a *Mobilising Housing First Toolkit*, designed to provide information for local authorities looking to implement Housing First at a local or regional level. Furthermore, the government also funded Homeless Link to produce a *Housing First Fidelity Assurance Framework* to support programmes to reflect on their fidelity to the Housing First principles.⁸⁰

Whilst these resources have been welcomed by the sector, concerns were raised over the ability of organisations like Homeless Link to monitor fidelity to the Housing First principles without the government committing to a vision for Housing First in England.

The question of 'fidelity' to the Housing First principles

The word fidelity is used in the context of Housing First to describe adhering to the principles that are meant to guide delivery. As Housing First is an internationally recognised and evidence-based intervention, it is important that services try to maintain a high degree of fidelity to the principles.

CSJ research has previously found that most providers of Housing First believe adherence to the principles is important,⁸¹ and international evidence suggest programmes with greater fidelity report better outcomes.⁸² A low-fidelity service may be called Housing First, but compromises on factors such as the intensity and open-ended nature of support.⁸³ Homeless Link state that "services without high adherence to the principles are less effective, risk bringing the model into question and impact the ability for the approach to be understood and adopted by policy and decision makers."⁸⁴

However, some experts have argued that adopting an inflexible high-fidelity approach is guilty of oversimplifying a complex intervention, which in England already looks very different to the original US service. One expert told us that there is a legitimate need to 'scale out' rather than to simplistically 'scale up' Housing First, meaning it is important to take into account the specific local contexts which would necessarily adapt the principles.

77 Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, Evaluation of the Housing First Pilots: Final synthesis report, October 2024, p. 12.

78 PoliticsHome, Labour Considers National Housing First Pledge to Tackle Homelessness Crisis, May 2024. Accessed: <https://www.politicshome.com/news/article/labour-considering-housing-first-nationwide-manifesto-homelessness>.

79 Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, Largest ever cash boost to turn the tide on homelessness, December 2024. Accessed: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/largest-ever-cash-boost-to-turn-the-tide-on-homelessness>.

80 Homeless Link, Staying on Track: Housing First Fidelity Assurance Framework, September 2024.

81 Centre for Social Justice, Close to Home: Delivering a national Housing First programme in England, February 2021, p. 28.

82 Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, Evaluation of the Housing First Pilots: Final synthesis report, October 2024, p. 13.

83 Centre for Social Justice, Close to Home: Delivering a national Housing First programme in England, February 2021, p. 28.

84 Homeless Link, Delivering high fidelity Housing First, 2019, p. 1. Accessed: https://homelesslink-1b54.kxcdn.com/media/documents/Housing_First_fidelity_guidance_1.pdf.

Low fidelity services become problematic when they fail to achieve positive outcomes and commissioners lose confidence in the Housing First model. One sector organisation told us that they came across a Housing First model where one support worker had over 60 cases (albeit temporarily) instead of the recommended maximum of six. A lack of long-term commissioning for Housing First services, insufficient funding and high staff turnover was referenced by one scheme as compromising their ability to provide flexible support. Common throughout most interviews with experts was the chronic lack of affordable housing options for Housing First, compromising the principle of a right to a home.

Case Study: The problem of low-fidelity Housing First

Key Community, a charity supporting young people at risk of homelessness, runs a Housing First service in South Shields. They told us that wide variation in Housing First delivery models can be problematic, as services offering only limited support risk causing harm to service users. The charity highlighted that the competitive nature of commissioning can create pressure to reduce costs, which in turn may lead some providers to deliver support on budgets that do not reflect the level of intensity required.

Key Community shared the case of a young woman who overdosed whilst living in Housing First accommodation. Whilst she had been housed under the principle of a right to a home, in the charity's view, the lack of appropriate support compromised her health, wellbeing and safety. This experience reflects academic research showing that whilst high-intensity, non-conditional interventions are most effective at improving housing stability and health, low-intensity interventions without conditions can risk harm.⁸⁵ This has significant implications for Housing First services in England that fail to provide the right level of support. Such models risk harming vulnerable individuals, misusing public funds, and undermining the broader credibility of Housing First.

Key Community stressed that Housing First can and does work, when it is delivered properly and targeted at the appropriate client group, as they have demonstrated through their own programme.

"We've been approached by a number of local authorities who have been looking to deliver 'Housing First' models that are not aligned to Housing First principles. They have adapted the model to meet their needs but haven't considered the customer's experience and in doing so have undermined the fidelity of the approach. This has ranged from using shared accommodation, using Assured Shorthold Tenancies and offering reduced or time restricted support. This reduces the success of the model and those failing are potentially used to demonstrate that Housing First doesn't work."

Housing Association in Close to Home.⁸⁶

Adapting Housing First to local contexts

Whilst the principles of Housing First are extremely important for running effective services, it is right that localities are able to adapt provision to meet local needs. For example, Housing First in rural Dorset will

85 Keenan, C., et al., "Accommodation-based interventions for individuals experiencing, or at risk of experiencing, homelessness," Campbell Systematic Reviews, 17:2 (June 2021), e1165.

86 Centre for Social Justice, Close to Home: Delivering a national Housing First programme in England, February 2021, p. 29.

look very different to a city-centre service in Westminster. One Housing First provider told us that every scheme will 'flex' the principles to take into account local context, and there are challenges of rolling out an extensive service when council budgets are stretched.

One adaptation of Housing First has been the use of congregate housing options which have been operated in several different countries. Whilst the original Housing First model used scattered housing sites,⁸⁷ the Finnish model utilised congregate housing blocks, with permanent support within groups of ordinary rental accommodation.⁸⁸

In the London Borough of Southwark, practice-based experience has demonstrated that some would-be Housing First service users feel they have to decline the offer of Housing First when delivered as scattered site housing. This group explained to the local authority that they value the camaraderie and sense of community found in congregate living settings. For them, scattered site housing signalled isolation and loneliness. Southwark Council are now developing two 'mini-communities' of modular housing to address the needs of this cohort, creating a more communal Housing First option.⁸⁹

Southwark Council also recognised the impact on the Housing First cohort of multimorbidity, and the earlier onset of frailty compared with the general population. This often means that Housing First residents need intensive support for chronic conditions that will not improve over time, whether in congregate Housing First or conventional older person's housing.⁹⁰

There is also evidence to suggest that congregate Housing First can be more effective than scattered site services. Whilst international research has shown that on the whole, most Housing First service users prefer scatter-site homes,⁹¹ a 2017 randomised control trial in Vancouver, Canada, found that only congregate Housing First was associated with significant improvements concerning severe disability, mental health, community integration and recovery.⁹² On the other hand, an Australian study suggested that congregate Housing First undermined service flexibility and reduced the capacity of services to respond to the diversity of service user needs and choices.⁹³ At our roundtable in Liverpool, Housing First practitioners explained that what was most important was housing choice, and that by giving people several options to pick from, services would have the best chance of ending an individual's homelessness.

"In Finland, their hostels have security of tenure, those people don't move around, they have access to all the services. Liverpool has massive hostel space, we spend lots of time moving people in and out, but if you build buildings, give security of tenure and have the right morals and fidelity it would work."

Housing First professional at the CSJ's Liverpool Roundtable

87 Padgett, D., et-al., *Housing First: Ending homelessness, transforming systems, and changing lives* (United States of America: Oxford University Press, 2016), p. 3.

88 Y-Foundation, *A Home of Your Own: Housing First and ending homelessness in Finland*, 2017, p. 15.

89 Evidence provided to the CSJ by Southwark Housing First.

90 Ibid.

91 Crisis, *Ending rough sleeping: what works?*, December 2017, p. 39.

92 Somers, J. M., et-al., "A Randomized Trial Examining Housing First in Congregate and Scattered Site Formats", *PLoS One*, 11:12 (January 2017), e0168745.

93 Verdouw, J., et-al., "Housing First programs in congregate-site facilities: can one size fit all?", *Housing Studies*, 33:3 (July 2017), pp. 386-407.

Housing First philosophy

Whilst this report is primarily concerned with Housing First as an evidence-based service model, Housing First is often described as a wider philosophy that should be applied to everyone experiencing homelessness. This can also be referred to as a housing-led approach to tackling homelessness.

The CEO of the Centre for Homelessness Impact, Dr Lúcia Teixeira, has argued that the 'true power' of Housing First lies in its underlying philosophy.⁹⁴ This means seeing stable housing as a preventative measure, not just as a solution to those already in crisis. Teixeira argues that the Housing First philosophy:

- › **Prioritises prevention:** shifting focus from managing homelessness to preventing it in the first place
- › **Ensures rapid rehousing:** helping people to secure permanent housing as quickly as possible, minimising the time spent in temporary accommodation
- › **Doesn't (re)traumatise people:** person-centred, dignified and choice-based services
- › **Has a collective impact:** breaking down service silos and fostering collaboration

In Scotland, the Simon Community, a homelessness charity providing a range of accommodation options, told us that their service adopts a wider Housing First philosophy across all of their housing pathways. Rather than Housing First being offered as one specific intervention, the principles are used to guide the delivery of a range of different housing options, prioritising flexibility, choice and long-term stability.

Housing First is part of an integrated offer to their service users that maximises housing choice, rather than one specific intervention. Despite not all of their service users being housed within a commissioned Housing First model, the principles of the programme apply to all service users.

In England, Mayor Andy Burnham has outlined his intention that Greater Manchester adopts a Housing First philosophy, joining up housing, health and support services within a preventative strategy.⁹⁵

Flexible and open-ended support is the most important principle

Several experts, including participants in a lived-experience roundtable, told us that the principle of flexible, open-ended, person-centred, and intensive support was the most important element of the Housing First model. This principle was considered more important than access to a permanent home. It is particularly important in the early stages of Housing First when a service user may be on the programme, but not yet in stable or permanent housing. Sometimes a service user will abandon or leave their accommodation, open-ended support at this point is crucial in helping someone move towards a positive housing outcome.

94 Centre for Homelessness Impact, Why the rise of the housing first philosophy matters more than the model, January 2025. Accessed: <https://www.homelessnessimpact.org/news/why-the-rise-of-the-housing-first-philosophy-matters-more-than-the-model>.

95 Greater Manchester Combined Authority, Finland-inspired homelessness scheme has changed lives in Greater Manchester, September 2024. Accessed: <https://greatermanchester-ca.gov.uk/news/finland-inspired-homelessness-scheme-has-changed-lives-in-greater-manchester/>.

Housing First outcomes

The evidence for Housing First

“Housing First has given me so much more than just a home, they’ve given me belief, they’ve given me understanding, support that I’ve never probably had in my life, so without Housing First, as a person, I don’t know who I would be.”

Housing First service user at a roundtable hosted by the CSJ

There is extensive international evidence which shows Housing First as an effective intervention to end homelessness and improve non-housing outcomes, including a downward trend in criminal and anti-social behaviour, physical and mental ill-health, and greater engagement with addiction services among service users.⁹⁶ In a summary of 30 studies, the Centre for Homelessness Impact state that there is “considerable reliable evidence” for Housing First as an intervention and “multiple high-quality studies [that] show positive impact.”⁹⁷

Despite some organisations who have raised concerns about the lack of ‘gold-standard’ evidence for Housing First in England (e.g. no randomised control trials),⁹⁸ the amount of evidence showing that Housing First is an effective intervention far exceeds the evidence for other services.⁹⁹ A lack of evidence is no justification for inaction when the alternative is even less substantiated.

In 2021, the CSJ outlined the comprehensive evidence that showed Housing First to be an effective intervention.¹⁰⁰ This included interim evidence provided by the national pilots. Since then, there have been two major contributions to the English evidence base. The first was a report published by Homeless Link in January 2024, exploring the holistic outcomes of Housing First service users across a wide range of areas.¹⁰¹ The second was the culmination of the national pilots evaluation in October 2024.¹⁰²

The national evaluation of the Housing First pilots in England

As part of the national pilots in Greater Manchester, Liverpool City Region and the West Midlands, an extensive evaluation process took place which completed with the publication of the final synthesis report in October 2024.

The evaluation recorded quantitative and qualitative evidence on the progress of service users from the time they entered Housing First to 12 months later, and then three years on. It is based on 312 service users who entered Housing First between November 2019 and November 2021.¹⁰³ The three year follow up survey asked Housing First staff questions about the living situations of those who provided baseline data when they entered the Housing First pilots. This took place in the summer and autumn of 2023.¹⁰⁴

96 Crisis, Ending rough sleeping: what works?, December 2017, pp. 31-52.

97 Centre for Homelessness Impact, Intervention Tool: Housing First, n.d. Accessed: <https://www.homelessnessimpact.org/intervention/housing-first#:~:text=Housing%20First%20provides%20safe%20and,%2C%20substance%20abuse%2C%20or%20income.>

98 Institute for Government, A smarter approach to homelessness: Prioritising prevention in the 2025 spending review, May 2025, p. 21.

99 Crisis, Ending rough sleeping: what works?, December 2017, p. 34.

100 Centre for Social Justice, Close to Home: Delivering a national Housing First programme in England, February 2021, pp. 29-32.

101 Homeless Link, More Than a Roof: Exploring the holistic outcomes of Housing First, January 2024.

102 Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, Evaluation of the Housing First Pilots: Final synthesis report, October 2024.

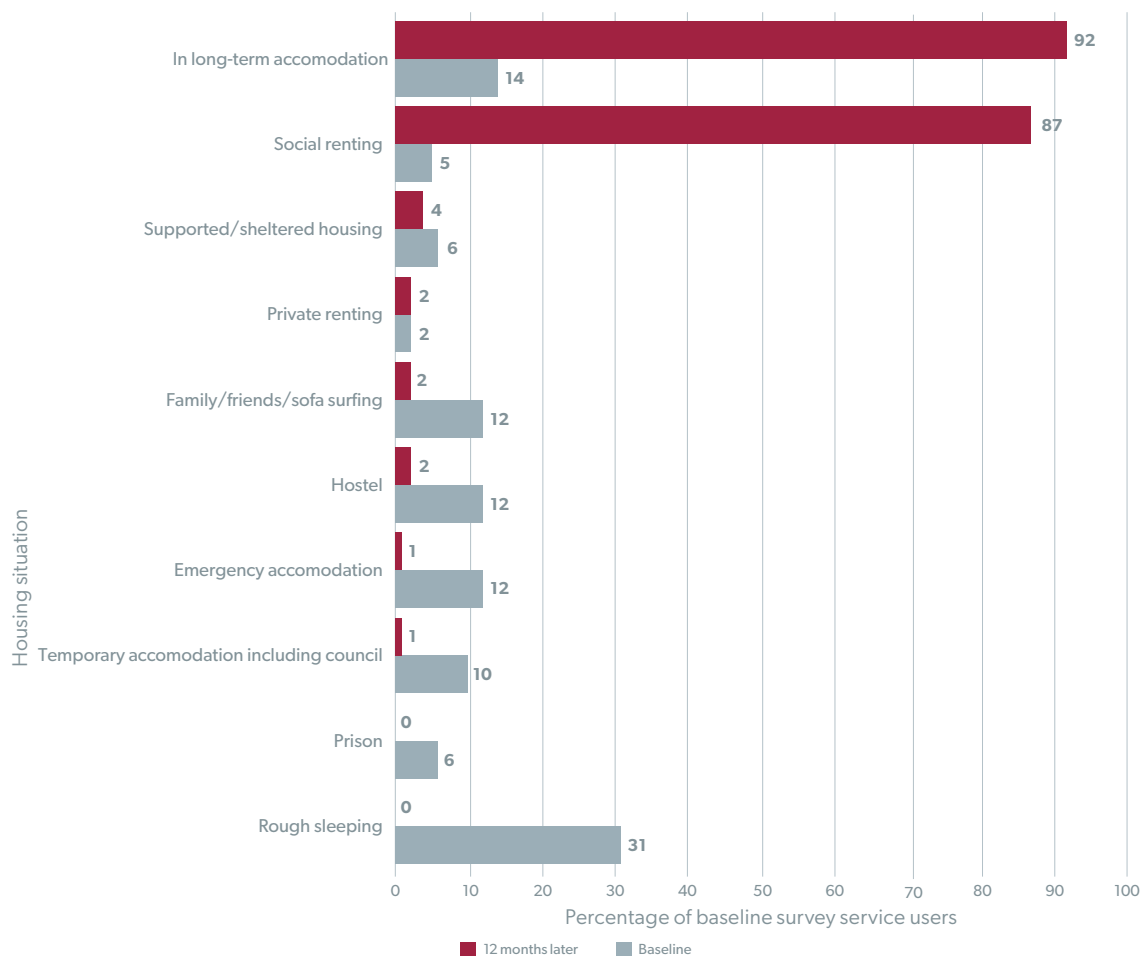
103 Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, Evaluation of the Housing First Pilots: Final synthesis report, October 2024, p. 23.

104 Ibid, p. 6.

Tenancy sustainment

The national pilots reported successful housing outcomes for the vast majority of service users who participated in Housing First. In the month prior to entering Housing First, 86 per cent of service users reported having precarious or unstable living conditions, with the largest group (31 per cent) sleeping rough for most of that month. A year on, 92 per cent of service users were in stable long-term accommodation, with no service user sleeping rough. Figure 13 shows the full range of housing outcomes after 12 months.

Figure 13: Housing situation of Housing First pilot service users at baseline and 12 month follow up

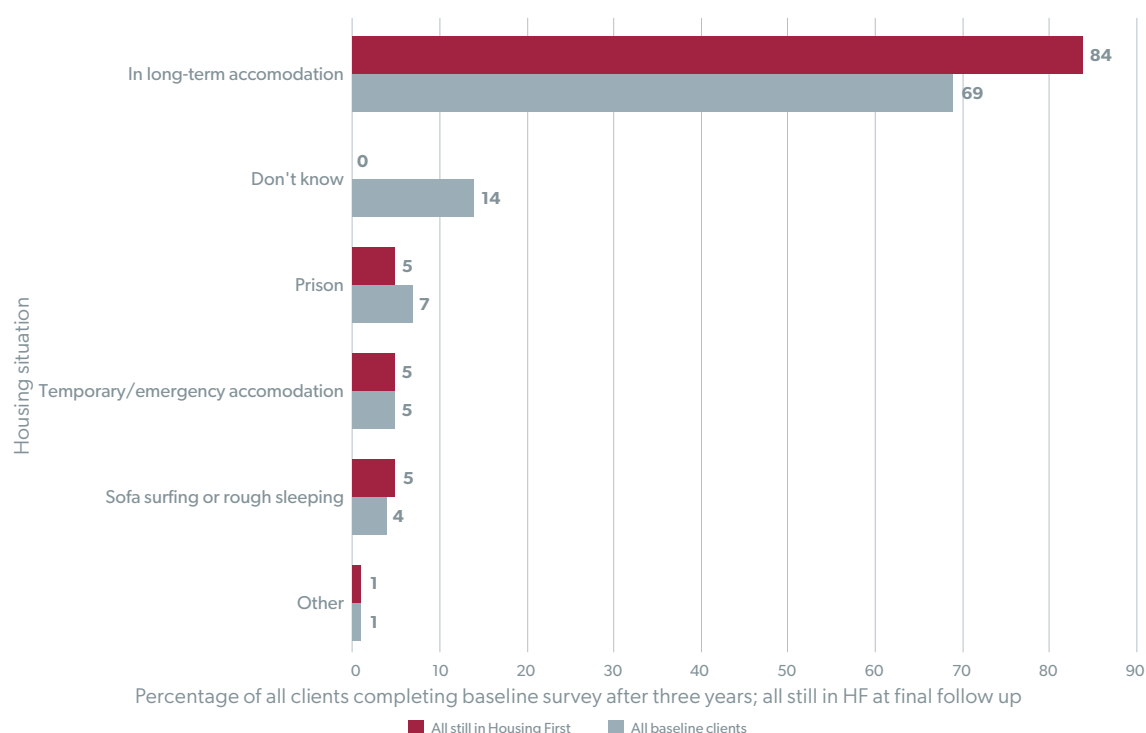


Source: Figure 3.1 in MHCLG, Housing situation in Evaluation of the Housing First Pilots: Final synthesis report, October 2024, p. 24.

After three years, 69 per cent of those who provided data were still living in long-term accommodation. Among those still in the Housing First programme, 84 per cent were in long-term accommodation. Out of those who had graduated from the programme or who entered alternative accommodation, 77 per cent were known to be in stable accommodation. Sadly, two per cent of service users who took part in the baseline survey were rough sleeping after three years.¹⁰⁵ Figure 14 shows the full list of housing outcomes after around three years.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid, p. 31.

Figure 14: Housing situation around three years after entering the national pilots



Source: Figure 3.8 in MHCLG, Evaluation of the Housing First Pilots: Final synthesis report, October 2024, p. 32.

Tenancy sustainment data from the national pilots is broadly in line with Homeless Link's analysis of English Housing First services which showed that 66.2 per cent of service users were able to manage a tenancy at the end of their third year on Housing First (meaning there was a low risk of service users getting evicted or losing their property).¹⁰⁶

Overall, the national pilots have delivered impressive housing outcomes for service users. Out of the original cohort that entered the pilot programmes, 91 per cent had experience of rough sleeping and nearly half (48 per cent) had not been in settled accommodation for between two and five years before entering Housing First.¹⁰⁷ By the end of the evaluation period, the majority had sustained permanent housing.

The evidence from the national pilots show that Housing First is effective in helping the majority of people with experience of chronic homelessness and rough sleeping sustain permanent housing. This is far greater than evidence available for the effectiveness of homeless hostels.¹⁰⁸

Despite Housing First working for the majority of service users, nearly a third (31 per cent) of baseline service users were not in long-term housing three years after entering Housing First. Housing First is not a panacea for all people whose homelessness is compounded by multiple and complex challenges. This shows the need for a variety of high-quality supported housing options for people whom Housing First is not an appropriate intervention.

¹⁰⁶ Homeless Link, *More Than a Roof: Exploring the holistic outcomes of Housing First*, January 2024, p. 38.

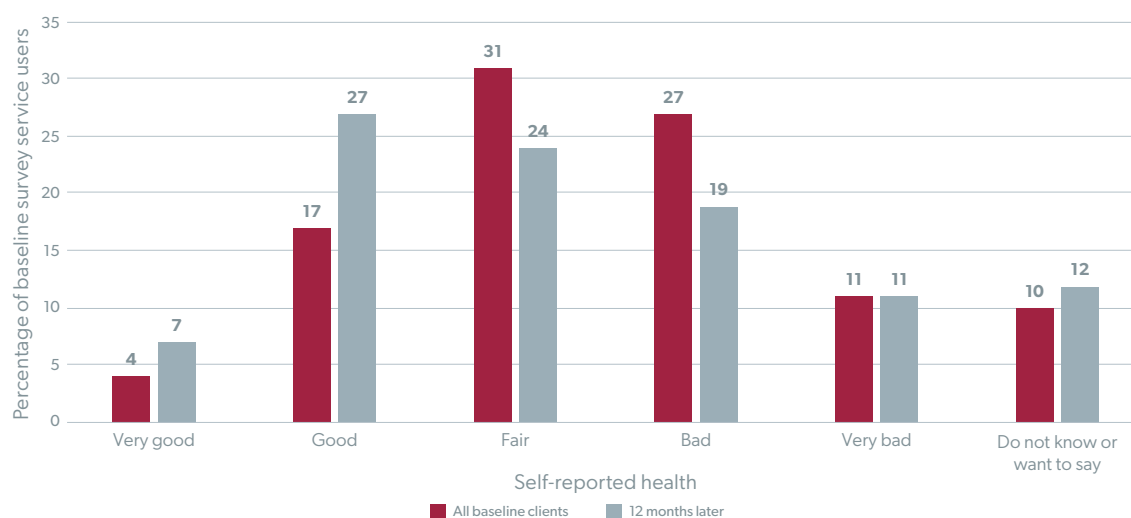
¹⁰⁷ Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, *Evaluation of the Housing First Pilots: Final synthesis report*, October 2024, p. 19.

¹⁰⁸ Centre for Homelessness Impact, *What is a Hostel in 21st Century Britain*, February 2025, p. 34.

Health and wellbeing

A year after entering the Housing First pilots, there had been a significant positive shift regarding the wellbeing, physical and mental health of service users. As per Figure 15, self-reported health after 12 months showed that more people said their health was very good or good, and the number of people saying their health was bad fell. Importantly, most of the shift had happened in relation to the proportion of service users reporting fair or bad health, showing a positive upward trend over time.¹⁰⁹ However, there was no significant change in the proportion of service users reporting that their health was very bad.¹¹⁰ This may merit further research, but most likely reflects the chronic health problems experienced by some Housing First service users.

Figure 15: Self-reported health of Housing First pilot service users at baseline and 12 month follow up



Source: Figure 3.4 in MHCLG, Evaluation of the Housing First Pilots: Final synthesis report, October 2024, p. 27.

In addition to self-reported health, fewer people reported suffering from anxiety and depression 12 months after entering Housing First. This relationship was also tested and found to be significant, meaning that the relationship between depression, anxiety and Housing First is unlikely to be chance. This means that Housing First is a statistically significant predictor of better health and wellbeing outcomes.

After three years, the survey of Housing First staff revealed that a large number of those still in Housing First were receiving treatment in relation to physical and mental health. During the previous six months to the survey, over half (52 per cent) had received treatment for physical health issues and over two in five (42 per cent) had received treatment for mental health issues.¹¹¹

These findings broadly reflect those of Homeless Link, which show that the Housing First service user group has a very high level of physical and mental health needs. Their survey of Housing First programmes show that a number of service users show a reduction in general physical and mental health needs over time (38.8 per cent and 54.5 per cent reduction after the end of the third year on Housing First, respectively), reflecting the importance of Housing First as a means for individuals to access health services.¹¹²

¹⁰⁹ Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, Evaluation of the Housing First Pilots: Final synthesis report, October 2024, p. 26.

¹¹⁰ Ibid, p. 26.

¹¹¹ Ibid, p. 33.

¹¹² Homeless Link, More Than a Roof: Exploring the holistic outcomes of Housing First, January 2024, pp. 25-26.

Furthermore, one of the most significant health issues facing individuals when moving into a Housing First tenancy is loneliness and social isolation. Whilst the national pilots' evaluation highlighted this as a common problem facing service users when they moved into a new home, it also found that a substantial number of service users were feeling less lonely and more socially connected a year after entering Housing First. The proportion of Housing First service users saying they felt lonely often or always fell from 35 per cent when entering the programme to 16 per cent 12 months later. The proportion saying they hardly ever or never felt lonely increased from 23 per cent at baseline to 41 per cent after 12 months.¹¹³

Crime

Nearly half of service users in the national pilots had contact with the criminal justice system in the year before entering Housing First. 44 per cent had anti-social behaviour actions taken against them in the prior six months, nearly three in ten (31 per cent) had been arrested and 16 per cent had been convicted of a crime.¹¹⁴ As well as perpetrating crime and anti-social behaviour, service users were very likely to have been victims as well. Only 26 per cent said they had not been a victim of crime in the previous six months to entering Housing First. 35 per cent had their belongings stolen, 31 per cent had been threatened and 29 per cent had been verbally abused.¹¹⁵

A year after entering Housing First, service users were significantly less likely to report being involved in anti-social behaviour or criminal behaviour. This fell from 34 per cent to 15 per cent and 29 per cent to 12 per cent respectively.¹¹⁶ However, after three years, 35 per cent of Housing First service users had some form of contact with the criminal justice system, broadly similar to the proportion who had been involved in anti-social behaviour before entering Housing First.¹¹⁷

Despite three-year outcomes appearing worse than those at 12 months, Homeless Link have identified a clear downward trend in criminal behaviour after three years of engaging with Housing First services, shown below in Figure 16.

¹¹³ Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, Evaluation of the Housing First Pilots: Final synthesis report, October 2024, p. 25.

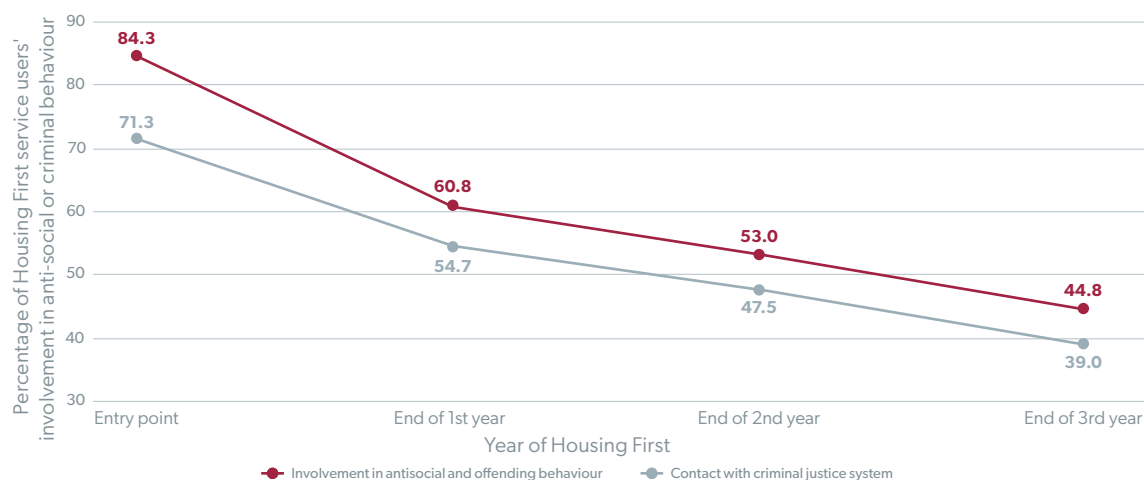
¹¹⁴ Ibid, p. 20.

¹¹⁵ Ibid, p. 20.

¹¹⁶ Ibid, p. 29.

¹¹⁷ Ibid, p. 33.

Figure 16: Percentage of Housing First service users involvement in anti-social or offending behaviour and the criminal justice system over time



Source: Chart 2.9 in Homeless Link, *More Than a Roof: Exploring the holistic outcomes of Housing First*, January 2024, p. 36.

It is important to note that the national evaluation recorded contact with the criminal justice system within the past year, whereas the Homeless Link study did not apply a time limit to when such contact occurred. This accounts for the higher proportion of Housing First service users reporting contact with the criminal justice system in the Homeless Link survey. At baseline, the figure of 71.3 per cent is very similar to the proportion of Housing First service users in the national pilots who had spent time in prison at some point in their lives (73 per cent).¹¹⁸ The percentage of those who had contact with the criminal justice system at the end of the third year (39 per cent) is also similar to the figure produced by the national evaluation (35 per cent).

Importantly, whilst this survey shows that there is evidence of a downward trend in anti-social or criminal behaviours over time, as well as a greater motivation to stay away from crime,¹¹⁹ a high proportion of Housing First service users continued to engage in negative behaviours three years after entering the programme. This shows the importance of services building in contingency plans for when criminal or anti-social behaviour occurs. We turn to this in Chapter Three.

Drug and alcohol use

Recovery from addiction to drugs and/or alcohol is rarely quick or straightforward, it is often non-linear, marked by periods of progress and relapse. This means that a limitation of both the national evaluation and Homeless Link's research is the relatively short timeframe of 12 months to three years. These durations, whilst useful for early indicators, are not sufficient for a robust longitudinal analysis of how Housing First is associated with trends in substance abuse over the long term.

In contrast to the improvements observed across housing and health outcomes, there were fewer signs of improvement in relation to substance misuse after 12 months and three years. These findings reflect the complex and challenging histories of Housing First service users, and the non-linear path to recovery. However, qualitative evidence suggests that for some service users, Housing First has been the foundation on which they have been able to make a recovery from addiction.

¹¹⁸ Ibid, p. 20.

¹¹⁹ Homeless Link, *More Than a Roof: Exploring the holistic outcomes of Housing First*, January 2024, p. 37.

At baseline, over one in four national pilot service users (27 per cent) said that they were dependent on drugs, and 17 per cent said they were dependent on alcohol. This fell to 25 per cent and 13 per cent a year later, showing only marginal improvement.¹²⁰ After three years, levels of support for drug and alcohol dependency were still high. Over half of service users (57 per cent) still in Housing First had received treatment in the previous six months for drug misuse, and a third for alcohol misuse (31 per cent).¹²¹

Qualitative data revealed that some service users had engaged with substance misuse services for the first time in years, supported by the trusting relationships built with Housing First workers. These relational dynamics were often the key to building motivation for change, even when behaviour change was gradual or inconsistent.

"I had a lady that was very high on heroin and was an alcoholic. She's now completely clean. She's still on script but she's not taking drugs...She's very happy where she is now, and she's really settled. She's doing really well, paying all her bills. It's just the simple things isn't it just to get her settled and happy. I'm referring her onto bike riding classes and things and she's doing well socially."

Housing First Support Worker¹²²

Homeless Link's research also shows that a high proportion of Housing First service users have substance misuse problems. Their research also shows that after three years, more service users were engaging with drug and alcohol services (60.4 per cent at end of third year compared 48 per cent at entry point) and fewer people were misusing substances (68.6 per cent at end of third year compared to 90.7 per cent at entry point).¹²³

Housing First is often the medium by which individuals with historic addiction problems are able to engage with services, often for the first time in a meaningful way. Addiction often takes years to overcome and the path to recovery is rarely linear. Despite a lack of evidence on Housing First's effectiveness at contributing to long-term reduction in substance abuse, the programme has given many people the opportunity to begin recovery for the first time.

Education and employment

As with outcomes regarding drug and alcohol dependency, there was little evidence from the national evaluation which showed service users being closer to the labour market after participating in Housing First. Only four per cent of Housing First service users in the national pilots were in paid work after 12 months.¹²⁴ However, in line with the Housing First theory of change, the severity of disadvantage experienced by the typical Housing First service user means it could take many years to be ready for work.¹²⁵ After three years, numbers in work or volunteering continued to be low. Only one per cent of Housing First service users were in paid work and just five per cent were volunteering.¹²⁶

¹²⁰ Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, Evaluation of the Housing First Pilots: Final synthesis report, October 2024, p. 28.

¹²¹ Ibid, p. 33.

¹²² Ibid, p. 34.

¹²³ Homeless Link, More Than a Roof: Exploring the holistic outcomes of Housing First, January 2024, p. 34.

¹²⁴ Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, Evaluation of the Housing First Pilots: Final synthesis report, October 2024, p. 29.

¹²⁵ Ibid, p. 29.

¹²⁶ Ibid, p. 33.

This is in line with Homeless Link's research which found that the proportion of Housing First service users who were not in education, employment or training (NEET) over three years remained relatively consistent. However, the proportion of service users who said they had a hobby and interest increased from nine per cent on entry to 37.2 per cent after three years.¹²⁷

Summary

Taken together, the evidence shows that Housing First supports meaningful improvements across a wide range of outcomes, not just limited to tenancy sustainment, but also health and wellbeing, engagement with drug and alcohol treatment, social connection and a downward trend in criminal behaviour. Whilst fewer positive outcomes were associated with drug and alcohol dependency and employment, this is in line with the Housing First theory of change which wouldn't predict an impact on these areas within the first years of the programme, given the severity of disadvantage experienced by a typical service user. In Chapter Three, we recommend ways in which the government can improve outcomes in areas where the national pilots did not find meaningful improvement.

The national pilots also included a cost-benefit analysis which showed that the programme was value for money. In Chapter Three we break down the cost benefit of implementing a targeted national Housing First programme.

Policy and political change

Alongside the conclusion of the national evaluation reports, there have been policy and political changes which effect the delivery of Housing First services in England. These are important to consider before we come to recommending a national Housing First programme in Chapter Three.

New legislation – *The Renters Rights Bill*

Renters Rights Bill – Opportunities for Housing First

The *Renters Rights Bill* is one of the most significant pieces of legislation effecting the PRS in decades. Formerly known as the *Renters Reform Bill*, which was introduced by the Conservative government in 2023, the Bill in its current format is intended to deliver a fairer, more secure and high quality PRS. The CSJ has long recommend several of the Bill's provisions, including the abolition of Section 21 notices (no fault eviction), replacing fixed term assured tenancies with a periodic rolling tenancy and a new decent homes standard for the PRS.¹²⁸

The Bill will help to tackle some of the root causes of homelessness in England. For example, at present the ending of a PRS tenancy is the most common reason for a household being at risk of homelessness.¹²⁹ In 2023/24, 28,160 households were owed a local authority homelessness relief duty after exiting a tenancy in the PRS.¹³⁰ The impact assessment for the *Renters Rights Bill* assessed that a benefit of the legislation would be a reduced number of homelessness duties owed by local authorities, leading to a reduction in temporary accommodation costs and a more stable PRS.¹³¹

¹²⁷ Homeless Link, *More Than a Roof: Exploring the holistic outcomes of Housing First*, January 2024, pp. 42-43.

¹²⁸ Centre for Social Justice, *Raising the Roof: Building a better private rented sector*, October 2023, p. 80.

¹²⁹ Local Government Association, *Renters' Rights Bill Second Reading House of Commons 9 October 2024*, October 2024. Accessed: <https://www.local.gov.uk/parliament/briefings-and-responses/renters-rights-bill-second-reading-house-commons-9-october-2024>.

¹³⁰ CSJ analysis of Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, *Statutory homelessness live tables*, April 2025.

¹³¹ Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, *Renters' Rights Bill Impact Assessment*, November 2024, p. 45.

Furthermore, provisions within the *Renters Rights Bill* (particularly the abolition of the Section 21 notice and the introduction of a periodic tenancy) could also make the PRS more attractive for Housing First services. This was discussed at the CSJ's roundtable in Liverpool where one participant explained how the Bill could open up an opportunity for Housing First services to partner with private landlords. Additionally, preventing landlords from charging over a month's rent in advance could help to remove financial barriers to accessing tenancies within the PRS.

Renters Rights Bill – Challenges for Housing First

Whilst the *Renters Rights Bill* will make some improvements to the PRS, there is a risk of unintended consequences for services and housing providers supporting vulnerable and complex service users, like Housing First. One of the most challenging aspects of delivering Housing First is sourcing appropriate housing for service users. A distinct challenge is the high-risk status and complex backgrounds of many Housing First service users.

This challenge was identified in the national pilots, with the evaluation finding that engagement with the PRS was mostly unsuccessful, with just two per cent of service users housed in privately rented homes at the end of 2022. One reason for this is that landlords are often unwilling to take on high-risk tenants with a history of multiple and complex challenges.¹³²

For private landlords, Section 21 and fixed term tenancies have traditionally provided a sense of security when letting to higher-risk tenants, giving them the security of being able to end a tenancy quickly without significant legal risk. From the perspective of many landlords, the *Renters Rights Bill* increases the perceived risk of letting to individuals with a history of homelessness. As a result, the pool of private landlords willing to participate in Housing First could shrink.

Whilst the *Renters Rights Bill* predominantly affects the functioning of the PRS, it also has implications for registered providers of affordable and social housing (registered providers). This will be of greater significance to Housing First services as the majority of service users are housed in social housing.

Many registered providers of social housing offer tenants a 'starter' assured shorthold tenancy of six to 12 months. Starter tenancies help to de-risk a new tenancy agreement for registered providers in case of anti-social behaviour, or if the tenant is unable to maintain the tenancy. Starter tenancies are usually followed by a long-term tenancy agreement.

The *Renters Rights Bill* is expected to end the use of starter tenancies as part of the wider abolition of fixed term assured shorthold tenancies. Similarly to the PRS, the perceived risk of renting to a Housing First service user without in-built contingencies like a starter tenancy could shrink the pool of social landlords willing to rent to people on Housing First. One charity leader told us that they had serious concerns about the willingness of housing associations to continue to participate in Housing First services once the passage of the *Renters Rights Bill* had been completed.

The government has recognised the risk of unforeseen consequences associated with the Bill and included new grounds for possession for some types of housing like supported accommodation. For example, there are new grounds for possession for the supported housing sector to end tenancies where necessary, as well as providers of temporary accommodation.¹³³

¹³² Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, Evaluation of the Housing First Pilots: Final synthesis report, October 2024, p. 39.

¹³³ Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, Guide to the Renters' Rights Bill, January 2025. Accessed: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guide-to-the-renters-rights-bill/guide-to-the-renters-rights-bill>.

However, since support and housing are provided separately in high-fidelity Housing First, these provisions do not apply when a service user is housed independently by a housing provider. Therefore, we recommend that MHCLG evaluate the impact of the *Renters Rights Bill* on Housing First services and consider possible amendments to the legislation that would allow for the use of starter tenancies in limited circumstances. This would protect the stock of social housing available for Housing First.

RECOMMENDATION

The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government should evaluate the impact of the abolition of assured shorthold tenancies including starter tenancies. If it is found that the abolition of assured shorthold tenancies would significantly decrease the availability of housing stock for services like Housing First, the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government should consider amending the *Renters Rights Bill* to allow housing providers to grant an assured shorthold tenancy to a Housing First service user for a limited period of time at the start of their tenancy.

Contemporary criticism of Housing First

Housing First has come under increased criticism, particularly from politicians, think-tanks and political commentators in the US. Effectively delivering Housing First in England requires engaging with criticism of the model in the US, where Housing First has formed a key pillar of the federal government's approach to tackling homelessness.

US criticism has predominantly come from conservative think-tanks. Organisations like the Manhattan Institute, Cicero Institute, Heritage Foundation and Pacific Research Institute have all published reports in recent years criticising Housing First. Critiques are centred on the themes below.

Housing First has a limited impact on the homeless population as a whole

Over successive years, the federal government has made Housing First the preferential option for tackling homelessness among all people experiencing homelessness. Critics argue that this is expensive and fails to tackle the root cause drivers of homelessness like substance abuse or mental ill health.

An example of how Housing First implementation differs between the US and the UK can be seen in a report published by the US think-tank, the Cicero Institute, which argued that in the US, believing Housing First is effective requires assuming it is universally applicable to all types of homeless people.¹³⁴ This contrasts to the UK approach, where Housing First has been specifically targeted at individuals with the most complex challenges. Whilst the Cicero Institute's claim may reflect a misunderstanding of how Housing First operates, it could also highlight the difference in how the service is delivered in the US.

This could explain why some in the US claim that Housing First is ineffective at ending homelessness at the population level. In many areas across the US, Housing First has been considered the sole response to tackling homelessness. As stated in this report, this would be to misunderstand the proper role of Housing First. Housing First as a sole intervention cannot end homelessness.

¹³⁴ Cicero Institute, *Why America's Homelessness Strategy Failed and How to Fix It*, October 2024, p. 7.

Furthermore, US critics are right to emphasise the importance of prevention, which whilst including investment in affordable housing, requires tackling the ‘human causes’ of homelessness, like substance misuse, mental ill health and family breakdown.

Housing First, delivered as a targeted intervention, has also been recognised by one critical US think-tank as a positive model. The Manhattan Institute say that whilst the service as an organising principle for an entire homelessness system will not save the taxpayer money, a Housing First intervention for a small segment of the homeless population may be cost effective.¹³⁵

Harm reduction doesn't work

US think-tanks have made several critiques of the harm reduction principle of Housing First. Harm reduction encompasses various strategies aimed at minimising the negative consequences and harms of drug misuse.¹³⁶ Whilst some aspects of harm reduction, such as the distribution of naloxone (a medicine that can reverse opioid overdoses) are less controversial, plans to provide facilities like drug consumption rooms have led to significant criticism and controversy.

In Housing First, taking a harm reduction approach means putting no condition around behaviour change on an individual or to require them to become abstinent.¹³⁷ For example, this means that access to Housing First is not conditional on engaging in treatment for addiction.

US critics have cited an increase in severe mental illness and chronic substance abuse among homeless individuals as demonstrating a failure of harm reduction.¹³⁸ They argue that the underlying philosophy of harm reduction, the view that people have a right to use drugs, and that drug use should be destigmatised, actively harms the people that Housing First claims to support.¹³⁹ Organisations like the Cicero Institute have even raised the possibility of the US federal government prosecuting Housing First services for permitting drug use in their housing units.¹⁴⁰

The underlying philosophy of some organisations lobbying for harm reduction is concerning. In 2024, the CSJ published a landmark report, *Still Ambitious for Recovery*, which drew on evidence from across the UK and abroad. Findings showed that efforts to liberalise drug laws (which could include some harm reduction approaches) do not tackle addiction and can have unintended and severe consequences, particularly for the most disadvantaged in society.¹⁴¹

Experts told us that Housing First can sometimes be an excuse not to invest in other services like drug treatment and recovery. This suggests that harm reduction can create a perverse incentive to deprioritise treatment and recovery, particularly if drug and/or alcohol treatment is seen as a less important aspect of Housing First delivery. This echoes criticism from one US think-tank which stated that “the only metric of success for Housing First is housing retention,” even if individuals experience greater addiction, mental ill health and despair.¹⁴²

135 Manhattan Institute, *Housing First and Homelessness: The Rhetoric and the Reality*, April 2020.

136 Centre for Social Justice, *Still Ambitious for Recovery: How to address illegal drug addiction and strengthen law enforcement's role*, December 2024, p. 67.

137 Homeless Link, *Delivering high fidelity Housing First*, 2019, p. 9. Accessed: https://homelesslink-1b54.kxcdn.com/media/documents/Housing_First_fidelity_guidance_1.pdf.

138 Cicero Institute, *Why America's Homelessness Strategy Failed and How to Fix It*, October 2024.

139 Cicero Institute, *Housing First Says OK to Drugs; Prosecutors Should Say No*, August 2025. Accessed: <https://ciceroinstitute.org/blog/housing-first-says-ok-to-drugs-prosecutors-should-say-no/>.

140 Ibid.

141 Centre for Social Justice, *Still Ambitious for Recovery: How to address illegal drug addiction and strengthen law enforcement's role*, December 2024, p. 6.

142 The Heritage Foundation, *The "Housing First" Approach Has Failed: Time to Reform Federal Policy and Make it Work for Homeless Americans*, August 2020, p. 6.

CSJ research has highlighted that whilst harm reduction can be a crucial step in saving lives and providing a pathway to recovery, it should not be viewed as an end in itself. Furthermore, rather than being at odds with abstinence, some aspects of harm reduction can complement it. Some harm reduction advocates argue that abstinence is only effective when it becomes the right approach for an individual. They say that this underscores the need to offer multiple pathways over time and to prioritise keeping people alive until they are ready to engage with abstinence-based programmes.

Housing First services should prioritise an assertive engagement approach, utilising various harm reduction tools alongside recovery strategies, providing flexible and long-term support for individuals with drug and/or alcohol dependencies. Harm reduction should never be considered an end for Housing First service users, but as a means to access treatment and recovery. Our recommendations on increasing access to drug and/or alcohol treatment are outlined in the next chapter.

Chapter three:

The Future of Housing First in England

This chapter sets out our proposals for a targeted Housing First programme, to deliver 5,571 places by 2029/30, for people whose homelessness is compounded by multiple and complex challenges, and who haven't been able to sustain permanent housing through conventional services.

We show how the government can effectively support the delivery of a national Housing First programme grounded in a shared understanding of what the programme should deliver and what constitutes success. We recommend ways in which central government can steward Housing First at a national level, whilst allowing local and combined authorities to take primary responsibility for delivering and/or commissioning local services.

Establishing a national Housing First programme

Over time, different methodologies have been used to estimate the number of places required for Housing First across England. We recommend that the first phase of a national Housing First programme should aim to replicate the relative size of the national pilots in other regions across England.

To estimate the number of places needed across different regions of England, we used data from the national pilots and the 2021 Census to model the scale-up and size of new Housing First services.

Previous estimates of Housing First provision and need

In 2021, the CSJ estimated that there were 1,995 Housing First places available in England, with between 16,450 and 29,700 places required. This drew on research conducted by Homeless Link¹⁴³ and Imogen Blood & Associates¹⁴⁴ in 2020 and 2018, respectively.

We deploy a different methodology in this report to estimate the places needed for a Housing First programme in England. A key difference is that our model does not seek to estimate the total number of people who would potentially benefit from a place on Housing First. Instead, our model shows what it would look like to replicate the scale of the three national pilots in other regions of England. We consider this the most realistic way of beginning a national Housing First programme in England, particularly because of the challenging fiscal environment.

¹⁴³ Homeless Link, The picture of Housing First in England 2020, November 2020, p. 13.

¹⁴⁴ Crisis, Implementing Housing First across England, Scotland and Wales, August 2018, pp. 19-21, 56.

Estimating the provision and need for Housing First in 2025

To understand the current availability of Housing First places across England, we made a freedom of information request (FOI) to all relevant local and combined authorities.¹⁴⁵ We asked if they were running a Housing First service and how many individuals it could support at any given time.

- › 37 per cent of localities said they were running a Housing First service, with a total of 2,824 places
- › 53 per cent of localities said they were not running a Housing First service
- › 10 per cent of localities failed to respond to our FOI

It is important to note that the combined estimate of 2,824 places is a rough guide to total Housing First provision. As stated, 10 per cent of localities failed to respond to our FOI, meaning any Housing First services available in these areas are not included in our total. Furthermore, our FOI only enquired about Housing First services run and/or commissioned by local or combined authorities, so our total does not necessarily include services operated independently of local authority control, although one local authority did include an independent Housing First service in their response.

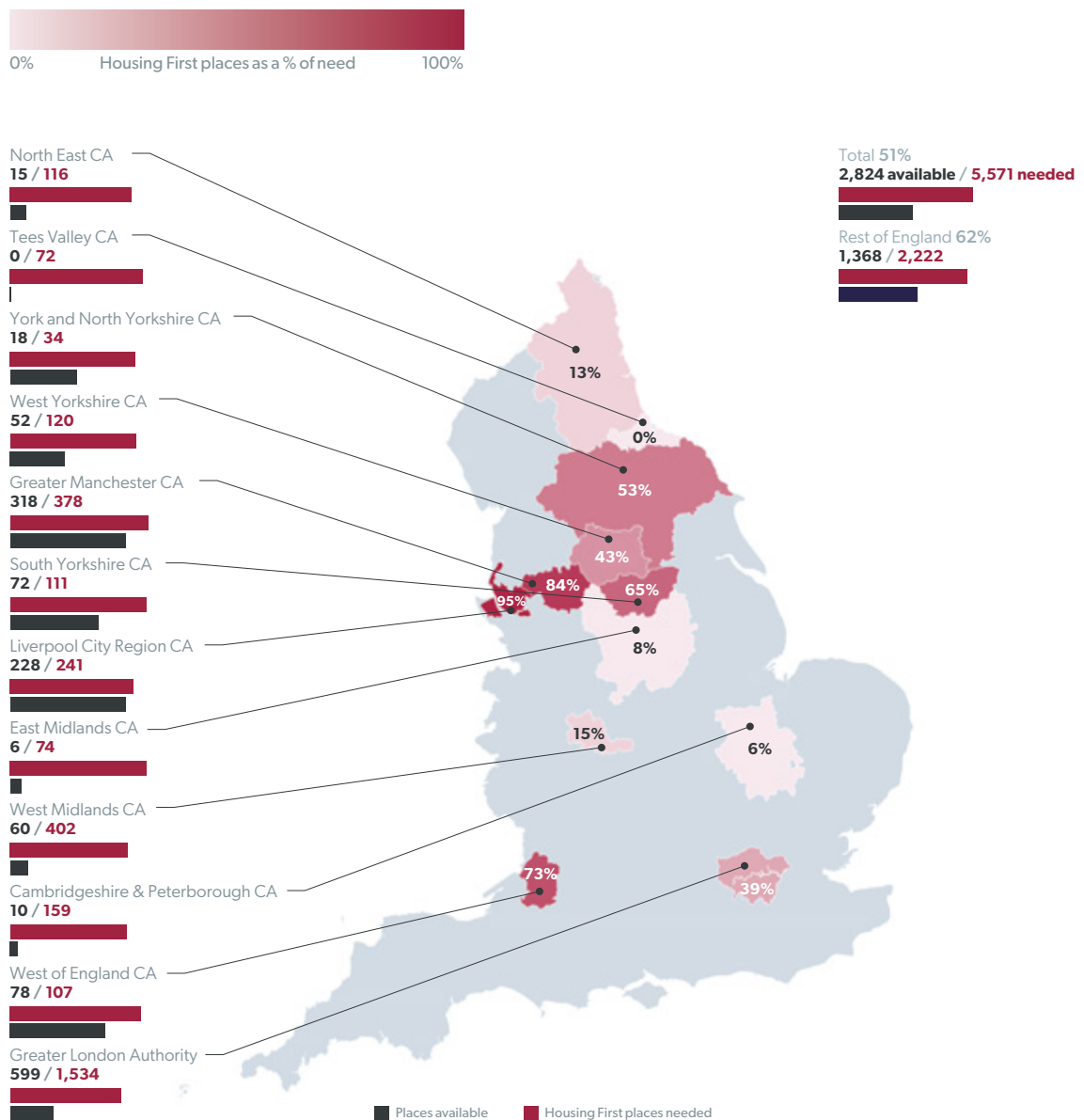
Scaling-up regional Housing First services

The first phase of a national Housing First programme should scale up to 5,571 places, from 2026/27 to 2029/30, an addition of 2,747 on top of existing services. This would replicate the relative size of the three national pilots, as of 2021/22, across the rest of England. Our methodology for estimating this is below.

In Figure 17, we show the breakdown of places as a percentage of need across eight combined authorities, the GLA and rest of England. Currently, Housing First places meet 51 per cent of total need across England. Estimates of current provision in the West Midlands, Liverpool City Region and Greater Manchester are based on the results of our FOI request in March 2025, which is different to the baseline provision assumed in our model, detailed below in Table 3.

¹⁴⁵ Liverpool City Region, Greater Manchester, Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, North East, West Yorkshire, West of England, West Midlands, Tees Valley, South Yorkshire.

Figure 17: Regional distribution of need and places for Housing First



Source: FOI of all relevant English local and combined authorities undertaken in March 2025, CSJ analysis of MHCLG, Evaluation of the Housing First Pilots: Cost Benefit Analysis – Final Report, October 2024.

Methodology - Estimating the size of a targeted Housing First programme

To estimate the size of a national Housing First programme, we first sought to understand the size of the national pilots in relation to the total homeless population in their respective localities.

Specifically, we compared the Housing First pilots caseload in 2021/22 (the peak of provision), to the number of homeless individuals recorded in the 2021 Census as living in hostels and temporary shelters in respective localities. Peak pilot provision in 2021/22 was 1,187, whilst the sum of people identified as homeless was 2,676.

This analysis produced a Housing First-to-homelessness ratio of 0.44. In other words, the number of people supported by Housing First was equivalent to 44 per cent of the total homeless population living in hostels and temporary shelters. This does not mean that 44 per cent of homeless individuals were receiving Housing First support, but rather illustrates the relative scale of Housing First provision compared to the wider homeless population.

Using the 0.44 ratio as a benchmark, we then applied this to combined authority areas,¹⁴⁶ the GLA, and the rest of England, to estimate how many Housing First places would be required to reach a similar level of provision to the national pilots across England.

Whilst unmet need likely remains (in part due to the increase in rough sleeping since 2021) and many pilot areas have expressed a desire to expand, this ratio is not intended to reflect total potential demand. Rather, it provides a benchmark for what a comparable level of provision would look like if replicated nationally, based on the approach taken in the three national pilots. This methodology is designed to model the first phase of a national Housing First programme.

Evidence from the Liverpool City Region local evaluation, which assessed projected need, suggested that current Housing First capacity was broadly appropriate. A similar conclusion was reached in the West Midlands.¹⁴⁷ These findings indicate the possibility that around 5,571 Housing First places could be sufficient to meet national demand.

Allowing time to scale up to this lower target would ensure that public funds are spent efficiently and only where demand exists. Following the implementation of this initial programme, the government should review whether further expansion is necessary from 2030/31 onwards.

Estimating Housing First caseload in the future

In order to translate national estimates of need to targets for local delivery, all local authorities should be asked to assess local levels of need and set targets for provision in collaboration with local homelessness partnerships. A standardised methodology should be developed by all relevant departments in collaboration with local government and homelessness partnerships to assess current and projected need for Housing First. The assessment of need should be aligned with local authority homelessness strategies and strategic plans for adults facing multiple disadvantage. Local targets should inform the national target and delivery plan for Housing First moving forward. A methodology to assess need for Housing First should capture current demand and forecast newly arising need. It could include individuals with a history of sleeping rough whose needs are not being met by existing services, as well as those with multiple and complex challenges who are at risk of rough sleeping.

¹⁴⁶ York and North Yorkshire, West Yorkshire, South Yorkshire, Tees Valley, North East, East Midlands, Cambridge & Peterborough and West of England.

¹⁴⁷ Campbell Tickell, LCRC Housing First Pilot: Local Evaluation, April 2022, pp. 24-25.

The latter group could include those in contact with the criminal justice system, drug and alcohol services, domestic abuse services, mental health services and children’s social care. This revised methodology could recommend a further scaling-up of services from 2030/31. More robust forecasts of the scale of need and costs in the longer term will help to inform consideration of how these costs are met after the first four-year phase of a national programme.

A national Housing First programme should work with local government to ensure that targets for scaling-up Housing First are realistic and prioritise areas with the highest levels of rough sleeping. A Housing First programme should also consider the time needed to develop partnerships, protocols and operating systems. This is why we model a gradual scaling-up of places to 5,571 by 2029/30.

The cost of scaling-up Housing First

As part of the first phase of a national Housing First programme, the government should aim to deliver 5,571 Housing First places by 2029/30, subject to a new nationally agreed methodology to assess local need. We have made an indicative assessment of the costs of a four-year Housing First programme to deliver 5,571 places by 2029/30. We outline how the Housing First programme should operate below, with a ringfenced Housing First Grant held within the consolidated RSPARG.

Over four years, we predict that a national Housing First programme would cost £103 million (£131 million including housing benefit). To estimate the cost of a national Housing First programme, we reconstructed total costs and benefits using primary data from tables in the national pilot cost-benefit analysis. We assumed the programme would begin in 2026/27 and that growth in provision each year would match that of the national pilots. This is because it takes time to lay the groundwork for Housing First, developing the required partnerships, systems change and protocols for running an effective service.

To understand the growth in Housing First places offered each year, we used 2021/22 delivery across the national pilots as a benchmark (peak year), we then identified what proportion of 2021/22 total places were being delivered across four years of the pilots from 2018/19 to 2022/23, as seen below in Table 2.

Table 2: Scaling up of the national pilots

Combined Authority	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
West Midlands	66	315	513	559	402
Greater Manchester	0	175	364	389	378
Liverpool City Region	0	61	175	239	241
Total	66	551	1052	1187	1021
Proportion of 2021/22 high point	0.06	0.46	0.89	1.00	0.86

Source: CSJ analysis of MHCLG, Evaluation of the Housing First Pilots: Cost Benefit Analysis – Final Report, October 2024. Sum of lowest level local pilot tables.

Using the 0.44 ratio, we then applied the benchmark to eight additional combined authority areas,¹⁴⁸ the GLA, and the rest of England, to estimate how many Housing First places would be required to operate at the equivalent peak capacity of the national pilots. For example, in West Yorkshire, 44 per cent of the total 2021 homeless population equates to 120 people. A service of 120 would therefore be operating at the same scale as the national pilots, using 2021/22 as a benchmark.

148 York and North Yorkshire, West Yorkshire, South Yorkshire, Tees Valley, North East, East Midlands, Cambridge & Peterborough and West of England.

Our model assumes that the three national pilot regions continue to run at the same scale as the final year of the evaluation in 2022/23, whilst other regions scale up to 2021/22 provision. It is worth noting that our FOI request revealed different levels of provision in the three national pilot regions to what our model outlines below, which is based on 2022/23 levels. In particular, we were made aware that many local authorities in the West Midlands had chosen to scale down their Housing First provision in the time since 2022/23. For the purposes of estimating the size and costs of a national Housing First programme, we presume that the three national pilot regions would be able to run at final year provision from 2026/27.

It is also important to note that our FOI of local authorities indicated that in the majority of the areas listed below, there are more Housing First places available than what we predict in the first year(s) of a national programme. Under a national Housing First programme, existing services should continue to be run at a local authority level, complimenting the scaling-up of services at a regional level. Because of this, it may be possible for regions to reach a higher level of provision earlier than we have modelled in Table 3. In the long-term, we assume that all Housing First services will participate in the national programme's approach to outcomes and fidelity.

Our model which predicts the scaling-up of Housing First across different combined authorities and regions over four years, and corresponding costs, can be seen below in Table 3.

Table 3: Scaling up Housing First over four years

Region	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29	2029/30
Greater Manchester	378	378	378	378
Liverpool City Region	241	241	241	241
West Midlands	402	402	402	402
York and North Yorkshire	1	14	30	34
West Yorkshire	3	49	107	120
South Yorkshire	3	46	98	111
Tees Valley	2	30	64	72
North East	3	48	103	116
East Midlands	2	30	65	74
Cambridge & Peterborough	4	66	141	159
West of England	2	44	95	107
Greater London Authority	35	631	1,360	1,534
Rest of England	51	914	1,970	2,222
Total number of places	1,125	2,893	5,054	5,571
Cost per year	£7,916,291	£20,355,268	£35,558,478	£39,199,698

Source: CSJ analysis of MHCLG, Evaluation of the Housing First Pilots: Cost Benefit Analysis – Final Report, October 2024.

The cost-benefit of a national Housing First programme

Housing First is good value for money, offering a 2:1 return on investment when including all financial savings, enhanced personal wellbeing and taking just the cost of providing the support element of Housing First. Table 4 breaks down the costs and benefits of the national pilots, taken from our analysis of the underlying data in the national evaluation cost-benefit analysis.¹⁴⁹ We also forecast the cost-benefit of investing in a national Housing First programme.

Table 4: Comparison of nominal costs and benefits of Housing First national pilots and forecasted national Housing First programme

Cost/benefit	Actual: Based on pilot data, 2018/19-2022/23		Forecast: Based on pilot data and forecast assumptions for wider rollout, 2026/27-2029/30	
	£ per person	Ratio of benefits: costs	£ per person	Ratio of benefits: costs
Cost of Housing First service	£7,036		£7,036	
Cost of Housing Benefit	£3,095		£2,184	
Cost of Housing First per client	£10,131		£9,221	
Reduced costs of public services	£7,920		£7,920	
Enhanced personal wellbeing	£6,246		£6,246	
Benefit of Housing First per client	£14,166		£14,166	
Net benefit/Cost of				
Public sector savings and enhanced personal wellbeing less cost of Housing First and housing benefit payments [all benefits and cost basis]	£4,035	1:40	£4,945	1:54
Public sector savings and enhanced personal wellbeing less Housing First spend [all benefits and cost excl. housing benefit payments]	£7,130	2:01	£7,130	2:01

Source: CSJ analysis of Evaluation of the Housing First Pilots: Cost Benefit Analysis – Final Report, October 2024. Unit costs/values and ratios are provided across all the different combinations of costs and benefits.

Note: This comparison of costs and benefits is largely based on Housing First national pilot data, nominal terms (2018/19-2022/23) unit costs and values, that are not inflated upward in the forecast period (2026/27-2029/30). This is because the programme and housing costs and public sector and wellbeing values will grow at unknown differential rates, which are not necessarily the same not straightforward to know. Therefore, the choice to leave the same nominal rates of the pilots is an attempt to estimate real-terms projections, assuming the prices remain static in real-terms.

For every £1 invested in Housing First, the government receives £2 in expected benefits. This includes financial savings to public services and enhanced personal wellbeing.¹⁵⁰ Housing First delivers significant savings for homelessness services, the NHS, criminal justice and the police.¹⁵¹ Including housing benefit, the total cost saving is 1:40, meaning that for every £1 invested, £1.40 is returned in benefits to the taxpayer and society. Housing benefit is usually excluded from social evaluation cost benefit analyses as its considered a transfer payment, rather than a direct cost or benefit from a specific intervention.¹⁵² For example, housing benefit is considered a reallocation of existing resources, whilst the savings made to public services due to Housing First are savings which reduce actual service use.

¹⁴⁹ Note: The comparison of costs and benefits in this report uses figures derived directly from the underlying data collected during the national pilots and included in tables in the Housing First Pilots: Cost Benefit Analysis – Final Report. During our review, we identified inconsistencies between the final totals published in the national pilots report and the figures produced when aggregating the underlying data. To ensure accuracy and transparency, we have used the recalculated totals based on the primary data. This may result in some differences from the summary published in the national evaluation reports, but we believe this approach provides the most reliable foundation for analysis.

¹⁵⁰ Changes in wellbeing can be assigned monetary values; however, these are not ‘real’ savings to public services.

¹⁵¹ Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, Housing First Pilots: Cost Benefit Analysis – Final Report, October 2024, p. 31.

¹⁵² Ibid, p. 34.

Furthermore, the national evaluation found that there was little overall change in housing costs between baseline and 12 month follow up for Housing First service users. This means that despite (where wellbeing savings are discounted) housing benefit appearing to make the programme a net-cost, there was little actual change in the cost of providing housing to people on the programme. Instead, costs shifted away from local authority homelessness services, towards support for social rented housing through housing benefit. This indicates that there was little overall change in housing costs before and after Housing First.¹⁵³

Funding a national Housing First programme

The government should establish a four-year national Housing First programme, co-led by MHCLG, the Department for Health and Social Care (DHSC), Home Office, Ministry of Justice (MoJ), and Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). The Housing First programme should be underpinned by a ringfenced fund of £103 million, held within the newly consolidated RSPARG.

How to fund Housing First

A four-year national Housing First programme to provide 5,571 places across England by 2029/30 would cost £103 million. By 2029/30 this would cost £39.2 million per year. To fund Housing First from existing spend, we propose the following measures:

1. **Scrap relocation expenses for civil servants.** The Places for Growth programme was set up to relocate government jobs, allowing departments to provide up to £14,000 per London based civil servant for relocation expenses.¹⁵⁴ Spending on these expenses alone is estimated to cost the taxpayer £10.4 million from 2026 to 2030. Recruitment, training and programme costs alone within the programme are estimated to cost £171 million over the same period. By redirecting relocation expenses for civil servants, and a 20 per cent reduction in recruitment, training and programme costs, the government would release £44.6 million to scale up Housing First. Given the extraordinary rise in homelessness, we believe the government's priority should be to help people sleeping rough into homes over civil servants.
2. **Allocate 5.5 per cent of the RSPARG annually.** The RSPARG already funds some Housing First provision in England and contains what used to be the RSI. We recommend allocating 5.5 per cent of this grant specifically for a national Housing First programme. This targeted allocation would generate an estimated £10.2 million per year and £41 million over four years, based on 2025/26 allocations.¹⁵⁵ This approach would preserve 94.5 per cent of the RSPARG for improving existing homelessness pathways, such as hostels, supported accommodation, and preventative services for those with fewer support needs.
3. **Utilise the new Transformation Fund for Housing First.** As part of the Spending Review 2025, the government announced £3.25 billion for the Transformation Fund, this includes £87 million for the prevention of homelessness and rough sleeping from 2026/27 to 2027/28.¹⁵⁶ We recommend the government allocate 20 per cent of this fund, equating to £17.4 million, to support a national Housing First programme.

¹⁵³ Ibid, pp. 33-34.

¹⁵⁴ The Cabinet Office, Places for Growth Formative Evaluation Report, October 2024.

¹⁵⁵ Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, Rough Sleeping Prevention and Recovery Grant allocations 2025 to 2026, December 2024. Accessed: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/rough-sleeping-prevention-and-recovery-grant-allocations-2025-to-2026>.

¹⁵⁶ HM Treasury, Spending Review 2025, June 2025, p. 16.

The full details of money raised to support a national Housing First programme can be seen below in Table 5.

Table 5: Funding for a national Housing First programme

Funding Stream	Money raised
Allocate 5.5 per cent of the annual RSPARG over four years	£40,989,733.64
Scrap relocation expenses for civil servants and cut the Places for Growth schemes' programme, recruitment and training costs by 20 per cent	£44,640,000.00
Allocate 20 per cent of homelessness Transformation Fund money	£17,400,000.00
Total	£103,029,733.64

Source: CSJ analysis of MHCLG, Rough Sleeping Prevention and Recovery Grant allocations 2025 to 2026, December 2024; Cabinet Office, Places for Growth Formative Evaluation Report, October 2024; HM Treasury, Spending Review 2025, June 2025.

Enabling multi-agency commissioning

A national Housing First programme should be cross-governmental, co-led by MHCLG, DHSC, Home Office, MoJ, and DWP. So far in England, funding mechanisms and commissioning arrangements for Housing First have been siloed within local authority homelessness services. This limits the pool of funding available for Housing First and means that non-housing outcomes are deprioritised.

A cross-governmental programme should acknowledge that Housing First has a range of benefits, in addition to tenancy sustainment, for the majority of service users. A cross-governmental approach at a national level should be used to support the commissioning of multi-agency Housing First services at a local level and to secure appropriate oversight of the engagement of health, mental health, adult social care, DWP, addiction, and criminal justice services in Housing First delivery.

Housing First services should also look to engage the third sector in delivery. For example, previous CSJ research identified the importance of supporting Housing First clients with buying essential items of clothing or furniture when they move into a property. Services could partner with charities like End Furniture Poverty, who provide new and second-hand furniture to those in need, to furnish the properties of Housing First service users. Localities should also ensure that commissioning arrangements are as simple as possible to encourage small and medium sized charities to bid for Housing First contracts.

RECOMMENDATION

The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, Department for Health and Social Care, Home Office, Ministry of Justice and the Department for Work and Pensions should establish a targeted, cross-governmental, four-year national Housing First programme, consisting of an £103 million four-year ringfenced fund, delivered annually as part of the newly consolidated Rough Sleeping Prevention and Recovery Grant. This would deliver 5,571 Housing First places by 2029/30 for people whose homelessness is compounded by multiple and complex challenges and have not been able to access permanent housing through conventional pathways.

A national Housing First programme should:

- a. Support the commissioning of multi-agency Housing First services within local and combined authorities.
- b. Be backed by an outcomes monitoring framework reflecting the objectives of all contributing departments.

The target of 5,571 places by 2029/30 should be refined to take into account local needs assessments and targets as they become available. In the future, estimates of current and projected need for Housing First should be produced in accordance with a nationally agreed methodology, in collaboration with local government, homelessness partnerships and national agencies.

Combined authorities should be encouraged to run and/or commission regional Housing First services.

Allocating places for Housing First

Housing First should be a targeted intervention, for people whose homelessness is compounded by multiple and complex challenges, and who have struggled to achieve permanent housing through conventional pathways. As a targeted intervention, there will not be enough places available for every person experiencing homelessness. This means that demand will likely exceed supply, and places need to be allocated fairly and carefully.

Housing First can also be an unpopular programme if service users are seen as bypassing normal procedures and rules or perceived as being 'rewarded for bad behaviour.' Housing First is also, upfront, an expensive intervention which grants access to scarce public services like social housing, the NHS and addiction recovery. Public support for services like Housing First should not be taken for granted, so it is important that there are clear processes for referring people onto Housing First, and rules over who is eligible. This is particularly important when it comes to the question of non-UK national eligibility for Housing First and what duty the government owes non-citizens.

As stated, the number of non-UK nationals sleeping rough has swelled since the COVID-19 pandemic. Whilst there are 13 per cent fewer UK nationals sleeping rough since 2017, the number of non-UK nationals has increased by 32 per cent.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁷ CSJ analysis of Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, Rough sleeping snapshot in England: autumn 2024, February 2025.

These numbers come in the context of increasing public concern about the scale of migration to the UK, notwithstanding the ability of government to pay for public services for migrants who are net-recipients from the state.¹⁵⁸ Public concern about migration has risen to its highest level since the 2016 EU referendum, with nearly half of adults (49 per cent) saying immigration is the single biggest issue facing the country.¹⁵⁹ Over two thirds (68 per cent) of UK adults say immigration is too high.¹⁶⁰

The scale of migrant rough sleeping poses challenges for Housing First and raises questions more broadly about what duty the government owes to non-UK nationals who find themselves rough sleeping or homeless.

As a moral principle, it is right that the government and wider society has a humanitarian concern, and recognises the equal dignity of all people sleeping rough in England, no matter their country of origin. In practice for individuals, this should mean resolving any unresolved immigration status, helping individuals access safe and secure housing, and where appropriate, providing support to return to their country of origin.

However, as Housing First is a limited resource, we believe it is fair that places on the programme are prioritised for those who have the strongest connection to the UK and local areas. This principle reflects the importance of maintaining consent for public services like Housing First and balances the importance of national borders and civic inheritance with the humanitarian solidarity owed to non-UK nationals who are homeless.

We recommend that when individuals are considered for a Housing First place, a local and UK connection test is used to determine access to the service. The test should not exclude non-UK nationals from Housing First but be used to prioritise those who have a demonstrable and sustained connection to the UK, as well as a local area (a local connection test should be extended to a regional connection test in the case of Housing First services run at a regional level).

RECOMMENDATION

Eligibility for a Housing First place should be determined by a UK and local connection test. To be eligible for Housing First, the test would require that a person:

- a. Be a British, Irish, Commonwealth citizen with a right to abode, or EEA or Swiss citizen with equal treatment rights
- b. Have recourse to public funds and have been lawfully resident (including rough sleeping or temporary accommodation) in the UK for a continuous period of ten years
- c. Arrived in the UK on a safe and legal resettlement or relocation scheme
- d. Have had a connection with a local or regional area for at least two years, including being, or in the past, resident (including rough sleeping or temporary accommodation) there, employed there, have family associations or because of special circumstances

Those who do not meet the UK or local connection test should still be supported through other homelessness support services but would not be prioritised for Housing First. Localities should also retain limited discretion in exceptional cases, such as where individuals face a clear safeguarding risk or have been trafficked. Members and veterans of the UK armed forces should be exempt from the test.

158 Centre for Policy Studies, *Taking Back Control: Why Britain needs a better approach to immigration*, May 2024, pp. 61-67.

159 Ipsos, *Public concern about immigration rises to its highest level since 2016 Brexit vote*, June 2025. Accessed: <https://www.ipsos.com/en-uk/public-concern-about-immigration-rises-to-its-highest-level-2016-brexit-vote>.

160 Opinium, *Opinium Voting Intention: 14th May 2025*, May 2025. Accessed: <https://www.opinium.com/resource-center/opinium-voting-intention-14th-may-2025/>.

Delivering a national Housing First programme

Below, we outline three delivery challenges which should be considered by the government when implementing a national Housing First programme.

1. The place of central and devolved government
2. Establishing a shared vision for Housing First
3. Securing access to settled housing

The place of central and devolved government

Oversight of a national Housing First programme should be led by central government, particularly in shaping a vision for the service across England. This should be grounded in collaboration with local government, with combined authorities or local authorities taking full responsibility for the delivery and/or commissioning of Housing First services.

Central government – providing national stewardship

In countries where Housing First has been scaled up successfully, central governments have taken responsibility for stewarding a shared vision of Housing First. In England, central government should take responsibility for maintaining a national approach to outcomes and fidelity, supported by a cross-governmental ringfenced fund.

The government have taken welcome steps to support the development of high-fidelity Housing First services by commissioning Homeless Link to produce a *Fidelity Assurance Framework* for services,¹⁶¹ alongside a *Mobilising Housing First Toolkit* for use by localities.¹⁶² This means that much of the groundwork has been laid for a more rigorous monitoring process if additional funding is committed.

Scotland and Wales provide two case studies of government stewardship of Housing First services. In Scotland, the government is committed to large-scale adoption of Housing First. This is backed by a monitoring framework where data is collected on household characteristics, referral routes into Housing First, support provision and tenancy sustainment. It also includes important data on non-housing outcomes like engagement with the labour market.¹⁶³

Homeless Network Scotland are funded by the government to provide a check-up process and report every year. They also run events for local authorities to support the development of high-quality Housing First services. Similarly in Wales, the equivalent homelessness sector organisation, Cymorth Cymru, are funded by the Welsh Government to provide a Housing First Wales Network, alongside a formal accreditation process for services.¹⁶⁴

In Ireland, the oversight and delivery of Housing First is overseen by a national directorate within the central government housing agency.¹⁶⁵ National monitoring and evaluation set expectations for how services should be delivered in line with the Housing First principles.

161 Homeless Link, *Staying on Track: Housing First Fidelity Assurance Framework*, September 2024.

162 Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, *Mobilising Housing First toolkit: from planning to early implementation*, October 2024.

163 Scottish Government, *Housing First*, n.d. Accessed: <https://www.gov.scot/collections/housing-first-publications/>.

164 Cymorth Cymru, *Networks*, n.d. Accessed: <https://www.cymorthcymru.org.uk/networks/>.

165 The Housing Agency, *Housing First*, n.d. Accessed: <https://www.housingagency.ie/housing-information/housing-first>.

During the rollout of Housing First in Finland, implementation from central government was supported by partnership agreements between national and local government. Letters of Intent between cities and the government were created, which included targets for the allocation of social housing for Housing First and set out funding available for the delivery of additional homes and support services.¹⁶⁶

In the UK, we recommend that a Housing First programme director is appointed within MHCLG with a specific responsibility to lead on the delivery of an implementation plan to deliver a high-fidelity Housing First programme, alongside a national monitoring and evaluation process. Furthermore, a senior civil servant should be appointed from the Home Office, DHSC, MoJ and DWP to sit on a cross-government steering group which would be responsible for the effective cross-governmental delivery of the programme, supporting the commissioning of multi-agency services in local areas.

RECOMMENDATION

The government should hold primary responsibility for developing a national implementation and evaluation plan for Housing First, alongside a shared approach to monitoring outcomes and fidelity. This should be led by a Housing First programme director within the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government. The programme director should be supported by a cross-governmental steering group, run by senior civil servants from all relevant departments. Oversight of a national Housing First programme should also include representation from local government, the homelessness, and social housing sector.

The role of combined authorities

One of the key strengths of the national pilots was the decision to deliver regional services through combined authorities. This approach not only reduced duplication and inefficiencies but also helped to overcome fragmentation between statutory services across local authority boundaries, enabling more coordinated, person-centred support for individuals with multiple and complex challenges.

There are several benefits to running Housing First at a combined authority level. Firstly, metro-mayors as regional ambassadors are able to increase awareness of what Housing First is, embed a regional Housing First philosophy with core priorities and regional principles, and also utilise their convening power as a potential source of income, using match funding initiatives to crowd in philanthropic funding for Housing First services. The Mayor of the Liverpool City Region, Steve Rotheram, said this at the CSJ's roundtable in Liverpool:

"...Housing First, which is a completely different approach to homelessness – helping people get a roof above their head along with wraparound support. It's been demonstrably successful here in Liverpool and working with partners we want to roll it out even further."

Steve Rotheram, Mayor of the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority

¹⁶⁶ Y-Foundation, A Home of Your Own: Housing First and ending homelessness in Finland, 2017.

Secondly, local authority boundaries are arbitrary, and many people experiencing homelessness or rough sleeping regularly move across different localities. This can make it very difficult to access public services like social housing. A combined authority approach is able to work across council boundaries, develop regional procedures and lobby for local systems change that are essential for running high-fidelity Housing First services.

For example, in Greater Manchester, Mayor Andy Burnham has created a cross-sector Housing First Unit which has issued three priorities across the region (supply, standards and support).¹⁶⁷ This means that different agencies across local authorities are able to work to the same priorities and performance indicators.

In the Liverpool City Region, they have taken a regional approach to sourcing properties for Housing First. When Housing First launched in 2019, existing housing allocation systems were not accessible to many service users, who had no ID or address history, criminal records or tenancy issues or who couldn't use online systems. The city-region Housing First service used its regional convening power to establish a cross-borough Housing Association Working Group, standardise flexible allocation policies across providers, create an city-region wide ID verification system which could be accepted in the absence of service user paperwork, and advocate jointly for system change through a regional allocations policy review.

To make the most of the capacity and strategic oversight of combined authorities, a national Housing First programme should encourage the development of region-wide Housing First services. Combined authorities, in collaboration with their constituent local authorities, should have the option to receive a single, block allocation for delivering Housing First. At the same time, individual local authorities should retain the ability to operate standalone Housing First services where appropriate. Crucially, the option to pool resources across local authority boundaries must remain available for areas without a combined authority to support more joined-up, efficient services.

RECOMMENDATION

A national Housing First programme should make provision for combined authorities to receive funding on behalf of their constituent councils, enabling the delivery of regional Housing First services. Where this occurs, combined authorities should be expected to adopt a regional model based on pilots in Liverpool City Region and Greater Manchester. The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government should consult on whether Housing First grant funding should be incorporated into the proposed integrated funding settlement for combined authorities, whilst maintaining a clear ring-fence to ensure funding is used exclusively for Housing First.

¹⁶⁷ Greater Manchester Combined Authority, Finland-inspired homelessness scheme has changed lives in Greater Manchester, n.d. Accessed: <https://www.greatermanchester-ca.gov.uk/news/finland-inspired-homelessness-scheme-has-changed-lives-in-greater-manchester/>.

A shared approach to monitoring and fidelity

We propose that a national Housing First programme contains a self-reflective approach to monitoring fidelity to the core principles. Services funded by the national Housing First programme should be required to engage with this support process. This should take the form of an annual Housing First Check-Up report, published by MHCLG and modelled on the Homeless Network Scotland Check-Up.

The annual Housing First Check-Up should not mandate a fixed type of Housing First service. Instead, it should be designed to support the delivery of high-quality and high-fidelity Housing First services, including congregate pathways. Homeless Link's Housing First England research programme has already created the foundation for this monitoring framework, with a regular series of events and publications supporting existing Housing First services. The *Fidelity Assurance Framework* includes a self-reflection tool for services that should be used in the development of future monitoring and evaluation processes. The government's monitoring approach could also take the form of a 'charter', where Housing First services can sign up to particular commitments.

Top line indicators within the Housing First Check-Up should include housing stability and prevention of eviction, health and well-being, reductions in offending and anti-social behaviour, engagement with drug and alcohol services and progress towards training or employment. Whilst the availability of consistent top line data is important to assess the impact of services at national and locality level, it is equally important that outcomes monitoring captures the distance travelled by individual service users on the basis of outcomes agreed individually with them, as well as incorporating measures that reflect local service priorities.

Whilst providing standardised top line indicators, a national approach should also encompass local flexibility and provide guidance on the range of appropriate tools and measures for capturing individual and service-wide outcomes. This should draw on learning from within and beyond the homelessness sector, including programmes supporting adults experiencing multiple disadvantage and providing psychologically informed services.

RECOMMENDATION

A Housing First programme should be supported by a robust monitoring framework which embeds a shared understanding and vision for Housing First in England. This should continue the commitment made during the national pilots to high-fidelity Housing First, alongside Homeless Link's *Fidelity Assurance Framework* and the *Mobilising Housing First Toolkit* published in Autumn 2024.

A new Housing First programme director should lead on the creation of an implementation plan, including funding arrangements and updated estimates of need across localities. A national Housing First programme should combine realism with long-term ambition. In the short term, scaling up the number of places should be prioritised in areas with the highest levels of rough sleeping. Time should be given to localities to develop the necessary partnerships, protocols and operating systems and to build an understanding of the Housing First model with local leaders, relevant agencies, housing providers and local communities.

The government's monitoring framework should be underpinned by an annual Housing First check-up report, published jointly by the departments responsible for administering the programme. This should be modelled on the Scottish Government's check-up process which is collaborative and self-reflective and build upon the work conducted by Homeless Link's Housing First England research programme. Housing First services in England should be expected to take part in this process to help align local delivery with the national framework and aims. The monitoring framework should also include the opportunity for peer review and support, especially after the self-reflection process has been completed and areas for development have been identified.

Non-housing outcomes – learning from the pilots on addiction, anti-social behaviour, and education, employment and training

Partnership working across a range of different services underpins the effectiveness of Housing First at delivering positive non-housing outcomes. A national Housing First programme should aim to improve outcomes in three areas in particular – addiction, anti-social behaviour and employment. These are areas where there had been less evidence of positive change in the national pilots.

Securing better outcomes on addiction, anti-social behaviour and employment aren't primarily about increasing public support, though better holistic outcomes will help achieve that. It's about ensuring that every service user has the chance to reach their full potential. The freedom that comes from overcoming addiction, or the purpose and opportunity that meaningful employment brings, can be truly transformative. Housing First should never be used by local authorities as a way to simply 'manage' complex challenges. It must be a catalyst for real change, improving lives and outcomes for some of the most disadvantaged people in our society.

Substance misuse

In Chapter Two we outlined why the principle of harm reduction in Housing First should not be considered an end in itself. Housing First services should prioritise an assertive engagement approach, utilising various harm reduction tools alongside recovery strategies, providing flexible and long-term support for individuals with drug and alcohol dependencies. Harm reduction should never be considered a standalone solution for Housing First service users, but as part of a broader strategy which integrates prevention, treatment, enforcement and recovery.

As stated, we heard qualitative evidence that Housing First has been used by some local authorities as an excuse for deprioritising access to addiction recovery services. A national Housing First programme should ensure that local authorities integrate services with addiction treatment and that harm reduction is never used as an excuse to not offer service users the opportunity to become abstinent.

The CSJ's recent report on the state of addiction and treatment in the UK, *Still Ambitious for Recovery*, revealed significant failures within the current system. Funding for addiction services and rehabilitation is 60 per cent lower than it was in 2012.¹⁶⁸ We recommend that the government re-commit to long-term ring-fenced funding for drug treatment services. This should include a three-to-five-year funding plan for better service planning and expansion of treatment options. The government should use the opportunity of launching a national Housing First programme to expand the offer of drug treatment services across England.

RECOMMENDATION

Alongside Housing First, the government should re-commit to long-term, ring-fenced funding for drug and alcohol rehabilitation and recovery services. This should include a three-to-five-year funding plan to allow for better service planning, staff recruitment, training and expansion of treatment options for those in a community setting like Housing First.

¹⁶⁸ Centre for Social Justice, *Still Ambitious for Recovery: How to address illegal drug addiction and strengthen law enforcement's role*, December 2024, p. 8.

Anti-social behaviour

Housing First can cause tension in local communities, particularly when there are issues with anti-social behaviour. This has been identified in Homeless Link's research where neighbours have complained about anti-social behaviour after Housing First tenants had moved in. Some also had a perception that individuals on Housing First were being rewarded for bad behaviour.¹⁶⁹

Anti-social behaviour is not acceptable to communities, and it must be dealt with firmly. Whilst evidence suggests that Housing First is associated with a decline in anti-social behaviour over time,¹⁷⁰ when it does occur, it must be tackled robustly. This is crucial to maintaining public and political confidence in a national Housing First programme.

One way in which Housing First services can contingency plan for anti-social behaviour is by adopting a 'managed move' protocol. The Bond Board, a charity which supports people with experience of homelessness into PRS accommodation, and a partner within Greater Manchester Housing First, explained the importance of 'managed moves' for Housing First services.

They said that in many cases the first property will not be the final long-term home of people on Housing First and that the second move is often more permanent. People on Housing First are often very vulnerable, prone to anti-social or harmful behaviours and have high support needs at the start of their Housing First journey, and this may result in the first tenancy not being sustained. Support at this point is crucial to ensure that the problems are understood, solutions are put in place, and the individual is able to move on to a positive housing outcome and not return to a cycle of rough sleeping.

To increase community confidence in Housing First and to ensure legitimate concerns about anti-social behaviour are dealt with, local authorities should ensure that Housing First services outline a clear 'managed move' protocol. The protocol should outline the steps that should be taken when a service user's initial tenancy breaks down and when local people raise serious concerns about anti-social or criminal behaviour taking place. This will help to ensure that Housing First tenants are able to move onto suitable and safe accommodation and provide reassurance to local communities that anti-social behaviour will be acted upon.

¹⁶⁹ Homeless Link, *Housing First England: Housing First and its impact in the community*, September 2019, pp. 8-9.

¹⁷⁰ Homeless Link, *More Than a Roof: Exploring the holistic outcomes of Housing First*, January 2024, p. 36.

RECOMMENDATION

A national Housing First programme should issue guidance on a Managed Moves Protocol for use by local services. The protocol guidance should provide clarity on when and how to move a Housing First resident who has a need to move either due to a negative outcome with the current tenancy or where they want to move for a positive change.

Managed Moves should be coordinated between Housing First support providers, housing and other relevant statutory services. Critically, a managed move should guarantee that no service user returns to rough sleeping.

When Housing First services are placing people into communities, they should work to understand the local context and ensure that the person being housed is likely to be able to thrive in the area. It is essential that Housing First services work to connect the supported person to the local community and ensure that they are able to live successfully in the tenancy. This includes learning lessons from any previous tenancies that were not sustained.

Housing First services should quickly engage with local communities when concerns are raised about anti-social behaviour. Concerns that are raised about tenants who are on Housing First should be quickly dealt with collaboratively by the housing and support provider.

Education, employment and training

The national evaluation of the Housing First pilots did not show a significant change in the proportion of Housing First service users who were in employment, training or education after three years. The severity of the disadvantage typically experienced by someone on Housing First means that one would not expect to see a significant change in employment after early stages on the programme.¹⁷¹ This means that many service users continue to be far from the labour market, although many express intentions or a desire to find work. Before entering the national pilots, nearly one in five (18 per cent) service users had never worked, 72 per cent had not worked in the last year and over half (52 per cent) had left school before the age of 16. Only just over half (54 per cent) reported any educational qualifications.¹⁷²

Whilst the vast majority of Housing First service users are far from the labour market, there are organisations able to support people with experience of homelessness and rough sleeping into work and/or training, and those that express a desire and/or can work should be supported to do so.

In November 2024, as part of its broader Get Britain Working Strategy, the DWP launched Connect to Work, which aims to connect local work, health and skills support to help those outside the workforce to get back into work.¹⁷³ Homeless people are a specified group eligible for support, and the DWP should ensure that under any scaling-up of Housing First, Connect to Work is integrated with local Housing First services.

¹⁷¹ Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, Evaluation of the Housing First Pilots: Final synthesis report, October 2024.

¹⁷² Ibid, p. 19.

¹⁷³ Department for Work and Pensions, Connect to Work: Grant Guidance for England, November 2024, p. 5.

RECOMMENDATION

The Department for Work and Pensions should ensure that the Connect to Work programme, as part of its broader Get Britain Working Strategy, includes support for people on Housing First. Jobcentre Plus should be tasked with actively integrating with local Housing First services to provide tailored, trauma-informed employment support to Housing First service users who are ready to engage in work. This will help ensure that those facing the most significant barriers to employment are not left behind in national efforts to improve labour market participation.

Access to housing

One of the greatest challenges for Housing First services is accessing suitable and affordable housing. The national pilots' evaluation acknowledged that securing access to affordable and suitable housing had been a major challenge across the lifetime of the evaluation.¹⁷⁴ This challenge is compounded by the lack of supply of affordable housing across the country. For example, 1.3 million households were on local authority housing waiting lists in March 2024, the highest figure since 2014.¹⁷⁵

The national pilots' evaluation highlighted that one of the most significant barriers to delivering a high-fidelity Housing First service was the limited availability of appropriate housing stock.¹⁷⁶ Whilst waiting times for housing reduced over the course of the national pilots, in some areas individuals waited nearly a year (47 weeks) to be housed.¹⁷⁷

Scaling-up Housing First effectively will require engaging with the government on three key areas: building more affordable housing, overcoming barriers to accessing social housing, and increasing access to privately rented accommodation.

Building more affordable housing

Challenges in accessing affordable homes for Housing First reflect the wider barriers faced by households across the UK seeking to access secure, good quality and affordable housing.

The supply of homes for social rent has fallen by six per cent since 1997 and 26 per cent since 1979.¹⁷⁸ The decline in the number of social homes for rent has particularly impacted people experiencing homelessness. St Mungo's research from 2020 highlighted that the proportion of single homeless people who move into social housing has decreased by 44 per cent in the decade from 2010 to 2020.¹⁷⁹

The government has made a welcome commitment to addressing the lack of affordable housing by promising the biggest increase to social and affordable housing for a generation, within the commitment to delivering 1.5 million new homes.¹⁸⁰ The government's consultation on making changes to Right to Buy, planning reforms and confirming £39 billion over ten-years for a new Affordable Homes Programme (AHP) are important steps in ensuring the UK is able to build new affordable housing.

174 Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, Evaluation of the Housing First Pilots: Final synthesis report, October 2024, p. 38.

175 Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, Social housing lettings in England, tenants: April 2023 to March 2024, February 2025.

176 Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, Evaluation of the Housing First Pilots: Final synthesis report, October 2024, p. 46.

177 Ibid, p. 39.

178 House of Commons Library, Social rented housing in England: Past trends and prospects, p. 31.

179 St Mungo's, Home for Good: The role of social housing in ending rough sleeping, October 2023, p. 3.

180 The Rt Hon Angela Rayner MP, Deputy Prime Minister speech at Social Housing Conference, November 2024. Accessed: <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/deputy-prime-minister-speech-at-social-housing-conference>.

Definitions

Affordable housing is housing for sale or rent for those whose needs are not met by the market. It includes various types of housing including affordable rent (at least 20 per cent below market rates), shared ownership and rent to buy schemes. Affordable housing includes social housing.

Social housing is low-cost rented housing typically provided by local authorities or housing associations and is usually around 50 per cent of market rates.

Building more affordable housing is also critical for ensuring long-term public and political support for Housing First. Housing First can be seen as unfair, if in a time of housing scarcity, individuals with histories of criminal activity, drug use and rough sleeping are seemingly ‘rewarded’ for negative behaviours, with housing granted ahead of other families and individuals.

The long-term political success of Housing First requires a sustained increase in the number of new affordable and social homes. A key principle of a national Housing First programme should be that the number of Housing First service users who move into social housing is matched by additional social housing provision.

We recommend that the government ensure that its plans to build 1.5 million new homes effectively aligns with its commitment to work towards ending homelessness. This will require ensuring the new AHP integrates with the government’s forthcoming homelessness strategy. Whilst the 2021-2026 AHP is able to support the development of supported housing, we recommend that Housing First is included within the new AHP as a type of development which can be supported. This could include congregate Housing First models, but also development where an agreed proportion of the affordable units will be utilised for a Housing First service. This could unlock new capital funding for Housing First homes across England.

Furthermore, to support the faster scale-up of Housing First, the government could introduce a replacement grant mechanism that enables registered providers to allocate existing general needs homes to Housing First service users, with the assurance that these homes can be replaced. Under this approach, providers would be eligible to bid into the AHP for capital funding to build like-for-like general needs replacements for any homes allocated to Housing First. This would allow the quick expansion of Housing First by making immediate use of existing stock, often the main barrier to delivery, whilst protecting the overall supply of affordable housing in the long term. This would help to guarantee the principle that every affordable home released for Housing First is matched by additional housing provision.

The government should also review existing capital funding for the delivery of new homes to tackle homelessness. In 2022, SHAP was launched to increase the supply of high-quality accommodation, including Housing First, for two target groups (people with long histories of rough sleeping and vulnerable young people).

SHAP is more suitable for Housing First services than funds like the RSAP as it is designed to increase the supply of long-term affordable housing for those with histories of entrenched rough sleeping, whilst the RSAP is designed to provide capital and revenue funding for move-on housing.

Whilst these programmes are able to support the delivery of new homes for services like Housing First, funding sustainability is limited, with revenue funding for support only committed for a certain amount of time before an expected integration with other local pathways and commissioning. This creates uncertainty for services like Housing First which requires a guarantee of long-term funding to be able to run the best possible services.

One local authority that uses SHAP funding for Housing First explained that whilst the capital funding helped unlock new housing stock, revenue funding is only available for three years. This forces local authorities to gamble that additional funding will be available beyond that period.

Although SHAP is better suited to Housing First than RSAP, the grant's structure limits long-term planning and creates uncertainty for services. It also places the millions invested through SHAP into Housing First at risk. If support becomes unviable after three years and tenancies fail as a result, the substantial sums spent on individuals' recovery could be wasted at a high cost to the taxpayer.

In the long-term, the government should consolidate SHAP and RSAP into one capital funding stream to deliver permanent homes for Housing First and other long-term housing pathways for rough sleepers. This should enable registered providers to increase the supply of one-bedroom homes, particularly for social rent. This provision should encompass acquisitions and tenure conversion, as well as new build, to maintain the supply of additional homes during any sector downturn.

RECOMMENDATION

The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government should take the following steps to increase housing supply for Housing First.

The new Affordable Homes Programme should make explicit provision for capital funding of homes for Housing First. Homes for Housing First should be recognised as an eligible development type within the programme, enabling local Housing First services to partner with housing providers to deliver purpose-built (or acquire) homes for Housing First.

To support faster scale-up of Housing First, the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government could also introduce a replacement grant mechanism within the Affordable Homes Programme. Under this approach, if registered providers allocate existing stock for Housing First, they would be able to bid into the Affordable Homes Programme for capital funding to build a like-for-like replacement unit for general needs housing. This would ensure that every home given to a Housing First service user is offset by a new affordable home, protecting the overall stock whilst accelerating delivery.

In the long-term, the government should consolidate the Single Homelessness Accommodation Programme and Rough Sleeping Accommodation Programme into one capital funding stream to deliver permanent homes for Housing First and other homelessness interventions. This should enable housing providers to increase the supply of one-bedroom homes, particularly for social rent. Whilst prioritising newbuild, this provision should encompass acquisitions and tenure conversion to maintain the supply of additional homes during any sector downturn. A key principle of this programme should be that the number of Housing First service users moving into social housing is matched by additional social housing provision.

Furthermore, to improve data collection, the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government should consult with the social housing sector on updating the Continuous Recording of Social Lettings system to record all Housing First lettings in general needs social housing.

In the short-term, local authorities should look at new models of financing affordable housing for people who are homeless. Wates Residential, a leading developer contractor, is exploring new ways to support local authorities in addressing homelessness through innovative housing delivery models. Wates suggests that their overall approval approach could deliver significant savings for local and central government, potentially reducing costs by £44,000 per year for each adult currently housed in the PRS, and by £63,500 per year for those accommodated in hotels or B&Bs.¹⁸¹

Case Study: Wates Residential Rapid Response Housing

Drawing on their experience working with Cardiff City Council to deliver modular homes for temporary accommodation, Wates is developing a modular offer including a potential lease/leaseback financing model aimed at unlocking underused public land to provide high-quality, relocatable temporary housing.

The leasing model is still in development but is being designed to ensure their modular solution to the temporary accommodation crisis is more accessible to cash-strapped local councils. The model would see them lease underutilised or temporarily available land to a special purpose vehicle (SPV), which would then commission the construction and installation of modular homes with a projected lifespan of over 60 years. Once built, the homes would be leased back to the authority on a long-term basis for use as temporary or transitional accommodation.

In future, this model could also support the expansion of Housing First. By enabling rapid deployment of high-quality homes on land awaiting regeneration, it could provide an interim housing solution for individuals waiting for a permanent Housing First tenancy. Alternatively, the model could be adapted to support small-scale, congregate Housing First homes.

Overcoming barriers to accessing social housing

In the short to medium term, scaling up Housing First will require increasing and retaining access to affordable, particularly social, housing. To work well with social housing providers, Housing First services should be able to give a guarantee of long-term support, work to achieve systems change so service users are able to access housing through the standard housing register application process, and ensure that services are co-designed alongside housing providers to alleviate and address concerns at an early stage.

“What’s been a real success is our service level agreements with housing associations - we can place people into long-term tenancies and help them grow from there.”

Housing First professional at the CSJ’s Liverpool Roundtable

¹⁸¹ Wates, A way back home: Rapid response housing for communities in need, 2025. Accessed: <https://view.ceros.com/wates/modular-housing-1/p/1>.

Firstly, strong trusted relationships with housing providers, built on the guarantee of long-term wrap-around support is critical to accessing affordable housing for services. The national pilots' evaluation identified that the willingness of registered providers to offer tenancies to Housing First service users was contingent on the level and length of support that could be provided to tenants.¹⁸²

This has also been iterated by the National Housing Federation, the representative organisation for England's housing associations, who have found that whilst many providers are supportive of Housing First, the most significant risk identified was around short-term support funding.¹⁸³ It is very risky to give a tenancy to a person with multiple and complex challenges without the security that intensive support will be provided for a long period of time. For example, as the Greater Manchester Housing First service approached the culmination of its funding in its fourth year, the number of housing offers from registered providers fell by 64 per cent from 104 homes to 42, reflecting concerns about the continuity of support funding.¹⁸⁴

Secondly, Housing First services should work with housing providers and local authorities to help service users access social housing through the standard housing register application process. Feedback from the national pilots highlighted that mainstream social housing allocation systems often exclude Housing First service users, due to histories of tenancy failures, criminal records, or histories of substance use, which may render them ineligible for general needs tenancies.

In response, some Housing First services have developed workarounds, such as direct agreements with housing associations that allow access to properties outside of standard nominations or allocations processes. Whilst these approaches can expedite housing access for individual service users, they fail to adequately reform systems to be accessible to people with complex histories.

Definitions

Choice based lettings are when social housing applicants can actively bid for available properties allowing people to make informed decisions about where they live, rather than being passively allocated a property.

Direct lettings refer to housing allocations made outside of standard choice-based lettings arrangements. A housing provider may directly offer a property to an individual or household without requiring them to bid.

Nominations are formal agreements between local authorities and registered providers that allow councils to put forward households from their housing register to fill homes owned by registered providers.

In the long-term, wider system change is necessary which will mean a move away from blanket restrictions on allocations on the grounds of tenancy history, rent arrears, anti-social behaviour or criminal convictions, towards an approach which works person-to-person. Whilst restrictions on access to housing are understandable when there is no offer of co-occurring support, there should be flexibility when an applicant is enrolled on a service like Housing First.

¹⁸² Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, Evaluation of the Housing First Pilots: Final synthesis report, October 2024, p. 39.

¹⁸³ National Housing Federation, Experiences of housing associations delivering Housing First, December 2020, p. 19.

¹⁸⁴ Data shared by Greater Manchester Housing First at Homeless Link Webinar, April 2025.

Case Study: Liverpool City Region – Reforming choice-based lettings systems

When the Liverpool City Region Housing First pilot was launched in 2019, the existing choice-based lettings system, Property Pool Plus (PPP), prevented many Housing First service users from being able to register and receive a housing offer through the mainstream route. Barriers included a lack of identification paperwork, previous tenancy failures, criminal records, an inability to provide references or access online platforms.

Ahead of broader policy reforms, the pilot developed a parallel 'Direct Lets' process in partnership with housing associations. This enabled service users to access housing (outside of choice based lettings), whilst the Housing First pilot continued feeding into longer-term reform.

The pilot established a Housing Association Working Group to agree to flexibilities within the allocation process, such as a verification letter from the combined authority that could be used in the absence of identification paperwork. The Housing First service also fed into the Housing Association Chief Executives Group and advocated for flexibilities across housing allocation processes and systems for all categories of homelessness.

As a result, in 2023, changes to PPP were implemented, exempting Housing First applicants from qualification criteria. This means that applicants can register and bid for properties if they have the capacity to maintain a tenancy, in line with the principle of having a right to a home.

Furthermore, Housing First service users are granted Band A status, which recognises their urgent rehousing need. There is also an appeals process built into PPP which service users can access if they feel their application has not been treated fairly by a landlord within the scheme.

Today, the majority of Housing First service users who previously would have been excluded from applying for PPP are now able to register and start bidding for properties. Some service users have embraced the use of PPP and taken ownership of their application, whilst others still require additional support around the bidding and allocation process. A number of successful housing offers have now been received through this route, and it serves as a positive example of what can be achieved when systems are flexed towards the needs of a complex cohort of individuals.

Case Study: Greater Manchester – Active Tenancies Approach

In its first few years, Greater Manchester Housing First pilot relied on a system of property pledges from housing providers. Whilst this secured initial buy-in, it became clear the pledge model lacked the ability to provide new tenancies and ensure sustained housing availability for the Housing First cohort. Pledges were often not matched by offers and there was a lack of choice offered to service users. Most importantly, the service was losing more tenancies than new offers from housing providers. In response, the pilot introduced the 'Active Tenancies' approach in 2024, transforming how housing partners commit to supporting Housing First. Core Features of the Active Tenancies model are below:

- Commitment to a rolling number of live tenancies, not just one-off property pledges
- Automatic replacement: When a tenancy ends (e.g. graduation, eviction, transfer), the provider replaces it without needing a new pledge
- Strategic borough-by-borough mapping: Local need is matched to housing providers' geographic footprints to ensure equitable distribution
- Clear targets and needs analysis: Each housing provider receives a bespoke ask based on capacity and local demand

The Active Tenancies approach has led to 41 properties delivered in the last six months to April 2025, compared to just 27 in the same period in 2024, an increase of 52 per cent. Furthermore, Greater Manchester Housing First are experiencing greater engagement and responsiveness from housing providers and reduced delays in rehousing service users during a managed move.

Thirdly, engaging housing providers in the design of Housing First services is an important part of securing buy-in and resolving issues at an early stage. In *Close to Home*, the CSJ outlined the importance of commissioners engaging with housing providers at the earliest opportunity and to give social landlords a role in shaping the systems for allocating homes to Housing First service users and protocols for resolving issues once the service is up and running.¹⁸⁵

"It all comes down to relationships - with the housing provider and with officers on the ground. We work incredibly hard to maintain those tenancies and stop evictions that would otherwise happen quickly."

Housing First professional at the CSJ's Liverpool Roundtable

This was reiterated to us by Housing First providers this year. One explained how evidencing the support that they provide to their service users was a crucial element in convincing housing associations to work with them – "People saw that we stuck with them no matter what". This service works directly with partner housing associations to place people in the right place for them, utilising a mix of choice based and direct lettings.

¹⁸⁵ Centre for Social Justice, *Close to Home: Delivering a national Housing First programme in England*, February 2021, p. 90.

RECOMMENDATION

A national Housing First programme should expect local commissioning teams to prioritise partnership working with housing providers to co-design Housing First services, with mutually agreed protocols for managing housing applications, nominations and access to choice-based lettings. Local authorities responsible for Housing First services should specify how access to social housing will be enabled.

This could include prioritising nominations and allocations for Housing First applicants, working within local authority areas to reform allocations policy and choice-based lettings systems, and using direct lets where appropriate to work around barriers created by eligibility restrictions.

Increasing access to privately rented accommodation

There are few Housing First services in England which have successfully utilised the PRS. The national evaluation found that engagement with the PRS was met with very little success. The evaluation highlighted that the success of the programme convinced a minority of landlords to participate, however several were sceptical that the level of support provided to tenants would be sufficient to mitigate problems.¹⁸⁶

Another barrier for services is that the PRS is less likely to be affordable than social housing. Very few PRS homes are within the local housing allowance (LHA) rate used to calculate housing benefit. For example, research commissioned by London Councils and Trust for London identified that just five per cent of PRS listings in London are affordable to low-income households using LHA.¹⁸⁷ This can limit affordability and choice for Housing First service users.

Despite these disadvantages, the PRS can play a useful role in certain Housing First services, particularly in areas of the country where the private market is more affordable. Upcoming legislative changes will also help to make the sector more secure and alleviate some of the challenges identified by Housing First services who have attempted to make use of the PRS.

The CSJ has previously raised the potential of social lettings agencies in scaling up Housing First in England. These are organisations that help vulnerable individuals and low-income households find and maintain PRS accommodation. This was the initial approach taken in Greater Manchester where an Ethical Letting Agency, funded by the combined authority, leased properties for ten years with a full management offer and income guarantees to landlords and then rented those homes to Housing First service users. Whilst this has not worked in the region to house Housing First service users in the long-term, similar models should be utilised where appropriate to scale up the provision of housing for Housing First.

RECOMMENDATION

The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government should ensure that a national Housing First programme contains guidance on how local authorities can establish or partner with social lettings agencies and other types of help to rent schemes.

¹⁸⁶ Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, Evaluation of the Housing First Pilots: Final synthesis report, October 2024, p. 39.

¹⁸⁷ London Councils, Only 5% of London private rentals affordable to low-income households, research finds, October 2024. Accessed: <https://www.londoncouncils.gov.uk/node/10947>.

Conclusion

This report has set out the case for a targeted expansion of Housing First in England, focused on the most entrenched and disadvantaged cohort of homeless people. It builds on the collective experience, evidence and learning from the national pilots, particularly the programmes in Liverpool City Region and Greater Manchester.

Homelessness and rough sleeping in England have increased significantly since the COVID-19 pandemic, placing growing pressure on local authorities and services like Housing First. The government has committed and protected additional funding for homelessness and rough sleeping through the 2025 Spending Review process. This creates an opportunity to invest in interventions that are proven to be effective.

We have outlined a fully costed, targeted national Housing First programme to deliver 5,571 places by 2029/30, ensuring that every region in England is able to share in the success of the national pilots. Alongside this, we have shown how the government can take responsibility for a shared-vision of Housing First in England, and prioritise non-housing outcomes like recovery from addiction, employment and a reduction in anti-social behaviour. Crucially, we have shown how the government can unlock greater capital funding to deliver homes for people moving out of homelessness.

List of Recommendations

A national Housing First programme

RECOMMENDATION 1

The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, Department for Health and Social Care, Home Office, Ministry of Justice and the Department for Work and Pensions should establish a targeted, cross-governmental, four-year national Housing First programme, consisting of an £103 million four-year ringfenced fund, delivered annually as part of the newly consolidated Rough Sleeping Prevention and Recovery Grant. This would deliver 5,571 Housing First places by 2029/30 for people whose homelessness is compounded by multiple and complex challenges and have not been able to access permanent housing through conventional pathways.

A national Housing First programme should:

- a. Support the commissioning of multi-agency Housing First services within local and combined authorities.
- b. Be backed by an outcomes monitoring framework reflecting the objectives of all contributing departments.

The target of 5,571 places by 2029/30 should be refined to take into account local needs assessments and targets as they become available. In the future, estimates of current and projected need for Housing First should be produced in accordance with a nationally agreed methodology, in collaboration with local government, homelessness partnerships and national agencies.

Combined authorities should be encouraged to run and/or commission regional Housing First services.

RECOMMENDATION 2

The government should hold primary responsibility for developing a national implementation and evaluation plan for Housing First, alongside a shared approach to monitoring outcomes and fidelity. This should be led by a Housing First programme director within the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government. The programme director should be supported by a cross-governmental steering group, run by senior civil servants from all relevant departments. Oversight of a national Housing First programme should also include representation from local government, the homelessness, and social housing sector.

RECOMMENDATION 3

A Housing First programme should be supported by a robust monitoring framework which embeds a shared understanding and vision for Housing First in England. This should continue the commitment made during the national pilots to high-fidelity Housing First, alongside Homeless Link's *Fidelity Assurance Framework* and the *Mobilising Housing First Toolkit* published in Autumn 2024.

A new Housing First programme director should lead on the creation of an implementation plan, including funding arrangements and updated estimates of need across localities. A national Housing First programme should combine realism with long-term ambition. In the short term, scaling up the number of places should be prioritised in areas with the highest levels of rough sleeping. Time should be given to localities to develop the necessary partnerships, protocols and operating systems and to build an understanding of the Housing First model with local leaders, relevant agencies, housing providers and local communities.

The government's monitoring framework should be underpinned by an annual Housing First check-up report, published jointly by the departments responsible for administering the programme. This should be modelled on the Scottish Government's check-up process which is collaborative and self-reflective and build upon the work conducted by Homeless Link's Housing First England research programme. Housing First services in England should be expected to take part in this process to help align local delivery with the national framework and aims.

The monitoring framework should also include the opportunity for peer review and support, especially after the self-reflection process has been completed and areas for development have been identified.

RECOMMENDATION 4

A national Housing First programme should make provision for combined authorities to receive funding on behalf of their constituent councils, enabling the delivery of regional Housing First services. Where this occurs, combined authorities should be expected to adopt a regional model based on pilots in Liverpool City Region and Greater Manchester. The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government should consult on whether Housing First grant funding should be incorporated into the proposed integrated funding settlement for combined authorities, whilst maintaining a clear ring-fence to ensure funding is used exclusively for Housing First.

RECOMMENDATION 5

Eligibility for a Housing First place should be determined by a UK and local connection test. To be eligible for Housing First, the test would require that a person:

- a. Be a British, Irish, Commonwealth citizen with a right to abode, or EEA or Swiss citizen with equal treatment rights
- b. Have recourse to public funds and have been lawfully resident (including rough sleeping or temporary accommodation) in the UK for a continuous period of ten years
- c. Arrived in the UK on a safe and legal resettlement or relocation scheme
- d. Have had a connection with a local or regional area for at least two years, including being, or in the past, resident (including rough sleeping or temporary accommodation) there, employed there, have family associations or because of special circumstances

Those who do not meet the UK or local connection test should still be supported through other homelessness support services but would not be prioritised for Housing First. Localities should also retain limited discretion in exceptional cases, such as where individuals face a clear safeguarding risk or have been trafficked.

Members and veterans of the UK armed forces should be exempt from the test.

Non-housing outcomes

RECOMMENDATION 6

The Department for Work and Pensions should ensure that the Connect to Work programme, as part of its broader Get Britain Working Strategy, includes support for people on Housing First. Jobcentre Plus should be tasked with actively integrating with local Housing First services to provide tailored, trauma-informed employment support to Housing First service users who are ready to engage in work. This will help ensure that those facing the most significant barriers to employment are not left behind in national efforts to improve labour market participation.

RECOMMENDATION 7

Alongside Housing First, the government should re-commit to long-term, ring-fenced funding for drug and alcohol rehabilitation and recovery services. This should include a three-to-five-year funding plan to allow for better service planning, staff recruitment, training and expansion of treatment options for those in a community setting like Housing First.

RECOMMENDATION 8

A national Housing First programme should issue guidance on a Managed Moves Protocol for use by local services. The protocol guidance should provide clarity on when and how to move a Housing First resident who has a need to move either due to a negative outcome with the current tenancy or where they want to move for a positive change.

Managed Moves should be coordinated between Housing First support providers, housing and other relevant statutory services. Critically, a managed move should guarantee that no service user returns to rough sleeping. When Housing First services are placing people into communities, they should work to understand the local context and ensure that the person being housed is likely to be able to thrive in the area. It is essential that Housing First services work to connect the supported person to the local community and ensure that they are able to live successfully in the tenancy. This includes learning lessons from any previous tenancies that were not sustained.

Housing First services should quickly engage with local communities when concerns are raised about anti-social behaviour. Concerns that are raised about tenants who are on Housing First should be quickly dealt with collaboratively by the housing and support provider.

Securing access to housing

RECOMMENDATION 9

The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government should take the following steps to increase housing supply for Housing First. The new Affordable Homes Programme should make explicit provision for capital funding of homes for Housing First. Homes for Housing First should be recognised as an eligible development type within the programme, enabling local Housing First services to partner with housing providers to deliver purpose-built (or acquire) homes for Housing First.

To support faster scale-up of Housing First, the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government could also introduce a replacement grant mechanism within the Affordable Homes Programme. Under this approach, if registered providers allocate existing stock for Housing First, they would be able to bid into the Affordable Homes Programme for capital funding to build a like-for-like replacement unit for general needs housing. This would ensure that every home given to a Housing First service user is offset by a new affordable home, protecting the overall stock whilst accelerating delivery.

In the long-term, the government should consolidate the Single Homelessness Accommodation Programme and Rough Sleeping Accommodation Programme into one capital funding stream to deliver permanent homes for Housing First and other homelessness interventions. This should enable housing providers to increase the supply of one-bedroom homes, particularly for social rent. Whilst prioritising newbuild, this provision should encompass acquisitions and tenure conversion to maintain the supply of additional homes during any sector downturn. A key principle of this programme should be that the number of Housing First service users moving into social housing is matched by additional social housing provision.

Furthermore, to improve data collection, the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government should consult with the social housing sector on updating the Continuous Recording of Social Lettings system to record all Housing First lettings in general needs social housing.

RECOMMENDATION 10

A national Housing First programme should expect local commissioning teams to prioritise partnership working with housing providers to co-design Housing First services, with mutually agreed protocols for managing housing applications, nominations and access to choice-based lettings. Local authorities responsible for Housing First services should specify how access to social housing will be enabled.

This could include prioritising nominations and allocations for Housing First applicants, working within local authority areas to reform allocations policy and choice-based lettings systems, and using direct lets where appropriate to work around barriers created by eligibility restrictions.

RECOMMENDATION 11

The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government should ensure that a national Housing First programme contains guidance on how local authorities can establish or partner with social lettings agencies and other types of help to rent schemes.

RECOMMENDATION 12

The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government should evaluate the impact of the abolition of assured shorthold tenancies including starter tenancies. If it is found that the abolition of assured shorthold tenancies would significantly decrease the availability of housing stock for services like Housing First, the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government should consider amending the *Renters Rights Bill* to allow housing providers to grant an assured shorthold tenancy to a Housing First service user for a limited period of time at the start of their tenancy.

