



HOUSING FIRST CHARTER FOR SOCIAL HOUSING PROVIDERS IN WALES

MARCH 2020

SCOPE OF CHARTER

This Charter has been developed by the Housing First Network Wales' Housing Management sub-group (consisting of senior housing management representatives from Housing Associations and stock-holding local authorities throughout Wales), with support from Cymorth Cymru and other stakeholders.

The consistent provision of quality housing and housing management throughout Wales is integral to Housing First being successfully delivered at scale. This Charter seeks to positively encourage housing providers to engage with the delivery of Housing First services at scale throughout Wales and welcome their involvement in the development and progression of how these services are delivered successfully.

This Charter identifies the key requirements that signatory housing providers (both Housing Associations and local authorities) in Wales will follow when providing accommodation to people engaging in Housing First services. This will enable services to be successfully delivered at scale, with highest possible fidelity to the Housing First Principles in Wales.

This Charter is by no means exhaustive; it is designed to illustrate the core elements of the provision of housing, housing management and the interaction with support services that should enable the successful delivery of Housing First services at scale in Wales.

This Charter is aspirational and aims to enable housing providers the best platform for Housing First services to be delivered at scale in Wales.

THE PRINCIPLES

A full summary of the principles can be found in the Housing First Principles document. For ease of use, they are repeated below.

- People have a right to a home that is affordable, secure, habitable, adequate both physically and culturally, and with availability of services (as per UN International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights)
- Housing and support are separated
- The service is targeted at people who demonstrate a repeat pattern of failing to maintain hostel accommodation and/or people rough sleeping or accessing emergency accommodation
- Flexible support is provided for as long as it is needed
- An active engagement approach is used
- Individuals have choice and control
- A harm reduction approach is used
- The service is delivered in a psychologically-informed, trauma-informed, gender-informed way that is sensitive and aware of protected characteristics
- The service is based on people's strengths, goals and aspirations, and as such has an explicit commitment to a small caseload
- The widest range of public services are involved from the outset



TERMS OF THE CHARTER

1. PROPERTY CHOICE

We will offer quality accommodation to those engaging in Housing First services. Properties will be allocated to Housing First service users based on informed choice. We will help providers which offer support to individuals engaging in Housing First services to make an informed choice on where the most suitable place for them is to live, within their means.

We accept that some individuals may choose to live in areas where they have either had a previous connection or no previous connection. In either circumstance, where this is an informed choice and there are no statutory restrictions, we will support the process to ensure that an individual has choice and control. We will continue to offer properties until the right property is found and refusals for properties will not affect a person's opportunity for continued property options.

2. ALLOCATIONS

We will proactively provide choice and control to those engaging in Housing First services. We will work proactively and flexibly within local authority allocation policies to enable properties to be made available to Housing First services. We will work proactively to support Housing First being used as one of the preferred methods for supporting people affected by entrenched rough sleeping and we will support this being reflected in local authority allocation policies. We will ensure that Housing First properties are not clustered in one geographical location to ensure communities are balanced.

3. RENTS

Rents will be at standard, affordable housing rates, in line with Welsh Government rent policies. No additional housing management or support charges will be added to the rent or service charge relating to the delivery of the Housing First service.

Any affordability assessments will be based upon likely future income (once engaged in the service) and accommodation will not be refused or delayed based upon current income. We accept that those engaging in Housing First services may not be in receipt of welfare benefits or other income when they begin their tenancy. RSLs should not expect rent to be paid a month in advance.

4. SERVICE LEVEL AGREEMENT

We will seek to use a Service Level Agreement that includes roles and responsibilities for both the provider of housing, support, the commissioner of the service and any other relevant agencies supporting the service, e.g. Health or the Police. This will enable all parties to understand their specific roles and responsibilities within the delivery of the Housing First service, including agreements on how to resolve conflict or disputes between parties involved in service delivery.

5. FUNDING ROUTES AND SOURCES

Funding for the provision of support in Housing First services may come from a variety of routes, including Welsh Government, local government, self-funded services or from charitable trust or foundation grant giving organisations. We accept and understand that funding sources are often time limited in their nature. Where situations occur where continuation funding is not available for the delivery of the Housing First service, we will work proactively with the support provider, Welsh Government, the local authority and any other relevant organisations to find a resolution which protects all parties involved, most importantly the people receiving support from the Housing First service. Where possible, we will add case studies and cost-benefit analyses to funding documents, to share and demonstrate good practice.

6. CLASSIFICATION OF PROPERTIES

Properties allocated for Housing First services will be classified as General Needs for the purposes for Housing Benefit. Specified or Exempt Accommodation classification will not be considered, as additional housing management charges added to the rent will not be considered. This is to ensure that the property is affordable and is not considered as supported housing.

7. HISTORICAL ARREARS

We will consider writing off historical arrears entirely. Where this is not possible, we will encourage the use of individualised budgets and work with the relevant local authority to source funds to reduce or clear any historical arrears. Where historical arrears cannot be cleared in full, a reasonable, affordable and achievable payment plan will be created for the outstanding balance. We will not prevent allocations as a result of outstanding arrears.

8. HISTORICAL DEBT

We will consider writing off historical debt for damages, legal fees or other similar charges entirely. Where this is not possible, we will encourage the use of individualised budgets and work with the relevant local authority to source funds to reduce or clear any historical debt. Where historical debts cannot be cleared in full, a reasonable, affordable and achievable payment plan will be created for the outstanding balance. We will not prevent allocations as a result of outstanding debts.

9. HISTORICAL ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR

We accept that people engaged in Housing First services may have historical anti-social behaviour issues. We will not unreasonably refuse to provide accommodation to people based on their historical anti-social behaviour issues on the understanding that the supportive resources available to those engaging in Housing First services are significant and will be a resource to prevent future issues. Where a person engaging in a Housing First service seeks to express their choice on where to live and wants to reside in an area where they have previously committed anti-social behaviour, we will support an informed property allocation to be made, based on the Housing First Principles Wales.

10. ENGAGEMENT WITH SUPPORT

We accept that people engaged in Housing First services are only expected to be willing to maintain a tenancy. It is likely that engagement with people in Housing First services will initially be intensive and this may taper to a minimum of a fortnightly visit from support. We will not enforce any housing readiness tests or assessments to be placed upon people accessing accommodation. This includes pre-tenancy courses or move-on training prior to accessing accommodation (which may be a barrier to people accessing Housing First services).

11. HARM REDUCTION

We will ensure that housing management policies utilised in the delivery of the Housing First service relating to personal substance use are consistent with a harm reduction approach.

12. INFORMATION SHARING

We commit to sharing and requesting appropriate information that ensure that risks are satisfactorily assessed. All information will be used within GDPR guidelines. We will commit to any Information Sharing Protocols that relate to the provision of Housing First, and we will amend our privacy notices accordingly. We will work proactively with all parties involved in the monitoring of the impact of Housing First services by providing relevant data, as and when requested.

13. TRIPARTITE AGREEMENTS

We will proactively use Tripartite Agreements with the service provider and the relevant commissioning authority to effectively manage these relationships for the benefit of the individuals engaged in Housing First services.

14. CRIMINAL RECORDS

We will not request criminal record checks and will rely upon information readily provided by the support provider, local authority and any other agencies providing support to those engaging in Housing First services. Where situations arise that may prevent or restrict a Housing First service user from living in certain areas, we will work collaboratively and proactively with relevant agencies to ensure that a property in a suitable area is sourced.

15. STEERING GROUPS

We will actively engage in local, regional and national steering groups relating to the provision of housing for Housing First services in Wales.

16. PUBLICITY

We will actively engage in publicity of our involvement and commitment to delivering Housing First services in our accommodation at a local, regional and national level. We will provide updates to the Housing First Network proactively on the successes, challenges and failures of delivering Housing First services.



17. COLLABORATION

We will actively seek to work with as many support delivery partners on local and regional Housing First projects, using our housing stock.

18. SEPARATION OF HOUSING AND SUPPORT

People accessing Housing First need to be assured that the support provider are there to focus entirely on their support issues and that this won't affect their housing. For example, the support worker will not deliver or enforce Housing Management activities e.g. rent collection or ASB, unless they are acting on an advocacy basis for the person engaging in the Housing First service.

In order to ensure closest adherence to the Housing First principles, we will have no undue influence on the way in which support is provided to individuals engaged in Housing First services. We accept that the provision of housing is not conditional on engagement with support within Housing First services.

19. ALTERNATIVE ACCOMMODATION

Where a Housing First service user has not succeeded in sustaining their tenancy within our accommodation, we will work proactively with the support provider to source an alternative property, either from within our own stock or from another housing provider. We accept that not all Housing First tenancies are successful, and we are committed to providing accommodation for those who are accessing in this type of service, irrespective of the issues previously evidenced. We will never evict Housing First clients into homelessness.

20. PROPERTY DEVELOPMENT

Where possible, we will proactively seek to develop or re-develop build properties that meet the needs of people affected by homelessness and engaging in Housing First services, in accordance with the requirements of the local housing strategy.

21. TENANCIES

Tenancies issued to Housing First clients will be the same as those issued to General Needs tenants. We may also choose to offer accommodation through our own PRS lettings agency (where relevant), in which case, the tenancy will be the same as those issued to anyone accessing this accommodation, via the usual routes.

22. DESIGNATED LEAD

We will identify a Designated Lead for Housing First within our senior management team who will lead on the consistent application of the principles of Housing First. The Designated Lead will be responsible for the development of relationships with support providers locally, regionally and nationally, and will seek to resolve any conflicts or issues that arise during the delivery of services within our housing stock. The Designated Lead may change from time to time and we will provide updated details as and when necessary to relevant agencies.

NEXT STEPS

On the next page is a copy of the Housing Management Charter. If you have any questions before you commit, please get in touch with Cymorth Cymru directly. Once you have signed, take a photo and publish it on your social media, send it to us to include in our regular newsletters, and help to drive forward the implementation of Housing First across Wales.



FOR QUERIES ABOUT HOUSING FIRST, PLEASE CONTACT:
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