



HOUSING FIRST:



A GUIDE FOR PRS LANDLORDS

This document acts as a basic guide to Housing First for Private Rented Sector (PRS) landlords who are interested in the approach and might consider being part of a Housing First project. Readers might also want to consider a second document, highlighting how a leasing scheme could be utilised or developed locally.

WHAT IS HOUSING FIRST?

- Housing First is an internationally acclaimed model which works to end homelessness;
- Housing First provides housing and intensive support to people who need it;
- Housing First needs committed landlords to provide properties.

Housing First is a unique approach to help us tackle homelessness. The approach has been evidenced to successfully support people with repeat histories of homelessness, who have experienced significant levels of trauma, into settled and stable homes.

Housing First offers long-term, affordable housing as quickly as possible for individuals experiencing entrenched homelessness, and then provides intensive, wrap-around support and connections to community-based support, to give individuals the very best chance to successfully maintain their tenancies and avoid returning to the streets.

International evidence proves how effective Housing First can be. By implementing Housing First in Wales, we have a real chance to help people who have spent years sleeping rough, move into a settled home where they can lead happy and fulfilled lives. Housing First hands control, choice, rights and responsibilities to people experiencing homelessness.



THE PRINCIPLES OF HOUSING FIRST

To ensure that services are true to the Housing First, a set of principles have been created. Essentially, the principles ensure that the model is successful and people have the support they need to maintain their tenancy. A full summary of these principles can be found in the [Housing First Principles](#) document.

1. People have a right to a home that is affordable, secure, adequate and fit for human habitation.
2. Housing and support are separated.
3. The service is targeted to those individuals who have a repeat pattern of not being able to maintain hostel accommodation and/or people who are sleeping rough and/or accessing emergency overnight accommodation.
4. Flexible support is provided for as long as it is needed.
5. An active engagement approach is used.
6. Individuals have choice and control.
7. A harm reduction approach is used.
8. The service is delivered in a psychologically informed, trauma informed, gender informed way that is sensitive and aware of protected characteristics.
9. The service is based on people's strengths, goals and aspirations - support providers will have a commitment to keep to a small caseload.
10. The widest range of support services are involved from the outset so that individuals can access them if they need to or want to.

WHY SHOULD PRIVATE LANDLORDS GET INVOLVED?

- Housing First is proven to be life-changing, tenants will receive intensive and targeted support to help them maintain their tenancy and transform their lives
- Private landlords working with Housing First will be playing a key role in getting people off the streets and ending homelessness
- If landlords sign up to Housing First through a Leasing Scheme, there will usually be guaranteed rental income, likely at Local Housing Allowance (LHA) levels, for a period of time.

The lack of social housing available in Wales, and indeed the rest of the UK, means that it is vital to explore opportunities of collaborative working with the private rented sector. We welcome partnership and closer working relationships with private sector landlords across Wales, so that we can all play our part in ending homelessness.

The widespread implementation of Housing First provides a rare opportunity for PRS landlords to be involved in applying an internationally evaluated and evidenced approach to ending homelessness in Wales.

Not only is Housing First an effective way of helping individuals transition from rough sleeping to maintaining tenancies, there is a strong social and business case for landlords getting involved in Housing First.

Due to the intensive, support that tenants can access 24/7, it is much easier for them to maintain their tenancies over long periods of time. International evidence has made this clear, with a variety of studies showing tenancy sustainment for 80-97% of all Housing First clients. Similarly, any issues with the tenant will be addressed by this intensive support, provided with input from multiple organisations and agencies.

HOUSING FIRST THROUGH LEASING SCHEMES

Involvement in a leasing scheme would mean that landlords would not be expected to be involved with day-to-day tenancy management. There are many benefits of a leasing scheme and we would recommend your involvement - a model leasing scheme is described in a document that should be read alongside this one.

Welsh Government are running [pathfinder leasing schemes](#) in parts of Wales; the goal is for this trial to provide a scaleable model that leads to a national scheme that provides significantly more affordable housing, of increased quality, with greater security of accommodation across Wales.

The concept and use of a leasing scheme, as outlined in this document, is endorsed by Cymorth Cymru, the Housing First Network, and the National Residential Landlords Association. Essentially, by signing up to a leasing scheme, whether locally or via the Welsh Government initiative, landlords would not be required to involve themselves in the management of their Housing First property.

SUPPORT AVAILABLE FOR LANDLORDS

If you get involved with Housing First, you will be working with experienced, trained support provider organisations with hard-working staff supporting your tenants with intensive support that has no time constraints.

The very nature of Housing First means that prospective tenants are likely to have a history of significant trauma, homelessness and other issues. That is why there is extensive support in place for tenants. Housing First operates without the usual barriers, such as being time limited and only accessible during certain points of the day. This support includes, but is not limited to, flexible therapeutic contact with support workers, benefit maximisation, support with health issues, and involvement in diversionary activities. By and large, this support will be extended to landlords who choose to let their properties directly to tenants (i.e. those who are not letting their properties through a leasing scheme).

Housing First practitioners have stressed the importance of maintaining good relationships with private sector landlords who make a commitment to offer their properties to their service(s).

Good communication is key to a successful Housing First tenancy and in practice, this has worked because Housing First teams have taken any questions and concerns that landlords may have seriously and responded rapidly and accordingly.

It must be noted, that the purpose of the support provider is to ensure that the tenant feels supported and understands that their offer for housing is not dependent on their engagement with support. With that being said, when working with Housing First tenants, support teams will often make themselves available to landlords to ensure that everything is running smoothly.

They are available as a point of contact for landlords who may have questions, concerns and even, potential issues with the tenancy. By making themselves accessible, practitioners are able to prompt tenants to certain issues and support, advocate and work alongside them to overcome potential barriers. There are usually Landlord Liaison Officers working specifically within the Housing First service to ensure landlords have the support that they need.

THE IMPACT OF PRIVATE LANDLORD INVOLVEMENT IN HOUSING FIRST

By supporting Housing First and providing properties to these services, private sector landlords have a real opportunity to make a significant change to homelessness in Wales. Below are some real stories depicting the changes in people's lives, as a result of private sector landlords offering their properties for Housing First services across Wales. Please note: names and some details have been changed to protect the identities of those involved.

CASE STUDY 1 - Provided by the Cardiff Council Housing First Team

'You have dragged me out of a doorway and brought me back to life'.

Prior to engaging with the Cardiff Council Housing First service, 'Brian' had been homeless for more than 13 years. With issues around addiction, his life consisted of rough sleeping, sofa surfing and sometimes accessing hostel accommodation. Unfortunately, 'Brian' felt completely let down by all the systems that were in place to supposedly support him out of homelessness and he truly believed that his life would end on the streets - and that this would happen fast. When the referral was made to the Housing First service, the team worked alongside 'Brian' to identify where he wished to live. Due to the commitment and support of a local private landlord, the team were able to secure a property that Brian was happy with, in the area of his choice.

Fast forward a few months, 'Brian' has been engaging in the Housing First service for the last six months and has been able to successfully maintain a tenancy for that entire period. There have been significant improvements in his physical health and he is voluntarily engaging in substance misuse treatment. He has also broadened his horizons in this time; he has taken on a gym membership and has also done some modelling work! This experience has also empowered him to train as a 'Peer Mentor' and support others who are currently experiencing homelessness with the aim, that they too, can live safe and happy lives. Both the private landlord and 'Brian' have felt supported throughout the entire journey and as a result, the tenancy is thriving. The hard work and dedication of the team in partnership with the private landlord and 'Brian' has enabled this success - a true partnership.

CASE STUDY 2 - Provided by The Wallich, Housing First Anglesey Team

'I had nowhere to turn'

When 'Jack's' relationship broke down, he had nowhere to turn. His ex-partner stayed in the flat they once shared, whilst 'Jack' roamed the streets without access to any help and support. With no family and friends close by for which he could call on for help, his only solution was to sleep in an empty barn. This was his story for over a year. He showered at the local leisure centre and for a long time, those close to him suspected nothing.

After engaging with The Wallich, Housing First Anglesey service, 'Jack' was able to move in to a property of his choice, in the area of his choice in just two weeks. This would not have been possible without the support and commitment of local private landlords willing to work with services in the area. With the dedicated work of his support workers and the commitment from the landlord, 'Jack' has been able to maintain his tenancy for the last seven years. Incredibly, his landlord offered him the option of a larger property in his portfolio, noting that 'Jack' was indeed, 'a model tenant'. 'Jack' made the decision to turn this offer down, understanding the practical elements of having to maintain a larger home. He remains happy and supported and his tenancy is strong and stable.

WHAT WE NEED FROM YOU

1. You should be willing to provide a long term tenancy

Housing First aims to provide tenants with settled accommodation and as such the tenancy should offer the tenant security beyond a typical short term let.

2. Your willingness to engage with the support provider, particularly during times when you or your tenant needs support during the tenancy

Intensive support will be provided for any prospective tenant entering in to a Housing First tenancy. However, there may be a time when the tenant no longer needs the support. As support provided as part of a Housing First approach has no time limits or constraints, the tenant is able to re-engage with support whenever they need it. If your tenant begins to struggle in the property, the support provider should be aware of this, and may need to engage with the landlord to develop a full understanding of the situation. This may also mean re-activating support if your tenant wants it. You will never be expected to provide the support yourself. The intensive support that exists for clients will also exist for you and, potentially, for the local community around the tenant - that is to say, you will always be able to speak to a support provider, should you need to.

3. You must be willing to let your property to benefit claimants

Housing First is about offering long-term, affordable housing as quickly as possible to those experiencing entrenched homelessness. This means that some tenants will be in receipt of social security and support providers will work with any prospective tenants to ensure that they are in receipt of all the benefits that they are entitled to. You must not impose restrictions on your property or properties, such as not letting to benefit claimants. You will need to ensure that your mortgage provider does not have any clauses in place that actively restricts you from letting to benefit claimants, prior to the start of a tenancy, to protect everyone involved.

4. You should recognise the separation of housing and support in this model

One of the principles of Housing First is that housing and support are separated. In practice this means that the housing provider (e.g. a private landlord) will not offer direct support to the tenant. With this in place, we still appreciate that PRS landlords may still need access to support when engaging with a Housing First service. You will always be connected to local Housing First teams in your area so that they can provide you, the landlord, with extensive support.

5. You should be sensitive when approaching Housing First tenants

Prospective tenants will have experienced a significant amount of trauma and repeated occasions of rough sleeping and other forms of homelessness prior to engaging with a Housing First service. In the event, that you require to speak to tenants directly, you will need to be trauma informed, empathetic and patient. Although landlords will not be privy to specific information about their clients' histories and backgrounds, they should be aware that Housing First projects tend to work with steering groups, who assess clients. As such, if there were issues (legal ramifications, for example) associated with a certain client moving into a certain property, these would be flagged as part of the process.

6. You should consider sharing your experiences

To illustrate the business case for Housing First, alongside the extensive international evidence illustrating the overwhelming effectiveness of Housing First, it would extremely useful if PRS landlords could consider sharing their experiences with your peers, via landlord forums and other appropriate groups.

FAQS

HOW WILL THE NEIGHBOURS OF, AND COMMUNITY AROUND, MY PROPERTY BE CONSIDERED?

Housing First tends to work using steering groups, made up of stakeholders who discuss clients and decide who is suitable to receive support, based on a range of criteria. Multiple agencies are involved in these meetings, and they would be expected to pre-empt any issues that might come up if a certain client was moved to a neighbourhood that might create issues for them. The client's background and the nature of the community into which they'd be moving would all be considered by the steering group, to ensure as few problems as possible arise.

WHAT IF THERE ARE ISSUES WITH ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR?

ASB is a concern for all landlords letting properties to members of the public. It should not be assumed that Housing First tenants will automatically behave in anti-social ways because they have had experience(s) of homelessness. However, we appreciate that it's important for you to be aware of mechanisms in place that can assist you and other neighbours with instances of ASB.

Where instances of ASB occur, landlords and neighbours will still have access to all mechanisms of reporting, just as they would any other tenant. This means that they can approach their Local Authority and if required, emergency services if appropriate.

Tenants have access to consistent support that is not time limited which means that they have support workers in place that act as advocates for them and their tenancy. This means that communication and dialogue will always remain strong with landlords and other parties.

WHAT IF THE TENANT APPEARS TO BE STRUGGLING WITH THE TENANCY AFTER SUPPORT HAS BEEN REDUCED OR WITHDRAWN?

As support provided as part of a Housing First approach has no time limits of constraints, the tenant is able to re-engage with support whenever they need it. If your tenant begins to struggle in the property, you will be expected to contact the relevant support provider to alert them. This may also mean re-activating support if your tenant wants it. You will never be expected to provide the support yourself.

Find out more on the Cymorth Cymru [website](#)
Email: HousingFirst@cymorthcymru.org.uk