

HOUSING FIRST: PRINCIPLES FOR WALES



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ABOUT THE HOUSING FIRST NETWORK WALES

The Housing First Network for Wales is a wide group of individuals and organisations with an interest in developing Housing First and implementing it across Wales. With representation from the third sector, the Welsh Government, local authorities, social landlords, health boards and more, it aims to ensure consistency, but also to share best practice and learning.

THE PRINCIPLES OF HOUSING FIRST

These principles have been developed as a result of a consultation process with a broad range of stakeholders. It builds on the existing research and principles from the extensive body of evidence across the world, as well as the summarised principles set out by Homeless Link, for England. There are no differences in terms of the core principles contained in this document, but specific additions have been made to clarify or reinforce key parts of the Housing First model.

WHY DO THESE PRINCIPLES EXIST?

With Housing First, we have a rare opportunity to adopt an internationally evaluated approach that works with people who have not been able to access the traditional help offered by the homelessness sector. There is widespread support and strategic direction from Welsh Government. To ensure that the approaches taken are as successful as they can be and to give maximum impact for those furthest from housing, it is vital that there is a consistent understanding of Housing First. This document sets out those key principles, which can be used as a checklist to establish the “fidelity” of a service to the Housing First model.

HOW DO I USE THE CHECKLIST?

This checklist is to enable self-assessment of a planned (or already-existing) service to establish the extent to which it meets the description of Housing First.

After discussion and consultation, specific principles were identified as being vital to Housing First projects, as any deviation from these principles would compromise the effectiveness of the model. As a result, a full score of 3 is required for these principles. Where failure to score a 3 would mean incompatibility with the Housing First model the description has been highlighted in red.

The remaining principles are more flexible so that organisations can still refer to a service as Housing First whilst working towards complete fidelity. These require a score of 2 or more. It is also worth noting that some principles need lower fidelity due to specific geographical or population challenges, for example, housing choice in more rural areas.

There is no minimum overall score, but a service that meets all the essential criteria, and obtains a 2 in all other areas can be called a Housing First service. However, where scores of 2 have been achieved, there are clearly areas where closer fidelity to the model can be developed.

A service that does not qualify as Housing First is not a poor service. It just means that it should not be branded as Housing First. There are many positive, effective and impactful services that fall outside of this category, but it is important that any service claiming to be Housing First meets the criteria outlined in this document.

ANY QUESTIONS?

If you have any questions about how to use this checklist, please contact the Housing First Wales Network secretariat at:
policy@cymorthcymru.org.uk

THE PRINCIPLES

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). It should also be dispersed in the community and not as part of an institution.

-  0 - People have to commit to treatment, or to changing lifestyle, in order to access accommodation. Housing is not affordable, secure, habitable and adequate.
-  3 - People can access accommodation regardless of circumstance, support or historical engagement; housing is affordable, suitable, secure, habitable and adequate.

Housing and support are separated

-  0 - Housing and support have no to little separation.
-  3 - Support and accommodation should be separate. Access to accommodation is not conditional on engagement with any generic support that may be offered by the landlord / accommodation provider.

The service is targeted at people who demonstrate a repeat pattern of disengagement with hostel accommodation and/or, individuals accessing rough sleeping or accessing EOS (Emergency Overnight Stay) at the point when the referral is made.

-  0 - The service is able to exclude on the basis of complexity.
-  3 - The service identifies and works with the most complex cases.

Flexible support is provided for as long as it is needed.

-  0 - Support is time-limited and finite.
-  3 - Support is ongoing, not limited by time, can scale up and down, and can be re-accessed when needed.

An active engagement approach is used.

-  0 - People have a waiting list for support, or have to meet certain criteria, before they can engage with the Housing First project, and if they refuse to engage, the offer is withdrawn.
-  2 - People are able to engage when they want, but there is limited outreach to encourage them and ensure the paths to engagement are open.
-  3 - People are approached regularly and engaged with, whether or not Housing First is taken up; the engagement takes place without proviso that someone needs to get involved; the service is ready to move quickly if the person changes their mind and wants to engage, to ensure “window of opportunity” remains open.

Individuals have choice and control.

-  0 - People are allocated one property without any choice; the tenure offered is on licence.
-  1 - People are able to choose properties, but within specific areas, or between properties of lower quality; the tenure offered is a full tenancy.
-  2 - People are able to choose properties based on a free choice from the housing available; the tenure offered is a full tenancy.
-  3 - People are able to choose properties across all tenures, and can request specific Private Rented Sector (PRS) properties to be considered / approached by the HF provider; the tenure offered is a full tenancy.

A harm reduction approach to substance misuse is used.

- 0 - Providers are prevented from taking risks in terms of harm reduction, and activities that reduce harm are actively forbidden in contracts either by commissioners or landlords. 
- 1 - Providers are able to take a minimal harm reduction approach, but are not able to ensure the correct support is in place. 
- 2 - Providers are able to ensure that a fully harm-reduction approach is adopted, and can act to ensure the most correct support is in place without fear of negative responses from landlords. 
- 3 - Providers can adopt a true harm reduction approach with the open support and endorsement from all stakeholders including RSL / PRS landlord, provider, police, NHS, etc. 

The service is delivered in a psychologically-informed, trauma-informed, gender-informed way that is sensitive and aware of protected characteristics.

- 0 - The service does not take into account the personal history or circumstances of the person, and the commissioning team limits, or sets strict criteria, for how providers should work. 
- 1 - The service is aware of the personal history or circumstances of the person, but as a result takes judgements to 'minimise risk', rather than working to adapt to those needs. 
- 2 - The service is working towards training its staff and developing partner stakeholders and ensuring that everyone involved in a person's journey to Housing First is fully aware (where needed) of the potential trauma and adverse experiences by the individual. 
- 3 - The staff of the service and partner stakeholders are trained and are aware of the personal history, trauma and experiences of their clients, and work to ensure their interactions are sensitive and responsive to those experiences. 

The service is based on people's strengths, goals and aspirations, and as such has an explicit commitment to a small caseload.

-  0 - There is a set approach for support for all people regardless of specific needs.
-  1 - There is an attempt to create individualised support, but services are commissioned on an hours-based basis, which limits the time that can be spent with people.
-  2 - There is an individualised, personalised service, but it acts in a way by which support is given 'to' an person, rather than 'with'.
- 3 - There is a commitment to co-production and service user involvement, where the person has a very real say in their support, and is able to suggest ways they can be supported; local commissioning is flexible with Housing First services monitoring and reporting to allow this.
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The widest range of services are involved from the outset (health, substance misuse, mental health, police), so individuals can access them if needed or wanted.

-  0 - The service is commissioned by the housing department with no involvement or buy-in from other services; the service is run with minimal to no involvement from other agencies.
-  1 - The service is commissioned with limited and / or late involvement from other services, and the service has no plan to run with involvement from other agencies.
-  2 - The service is commissioned with planned involvement from other services, and there is a plan to involve those services, but no shared MoU or limited commitments.
- 3 - The service is commissioned with full partnership approaches, there is regular commitment by all stakeholders to review the systems and continue to support individuals, there are "fast-track" referral procedures put in place to improve access to health and mental health services.
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**FOR QUERIES ABOUT HOUSING FIRST, PLEASE CONTACT:
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