



**HOUSING
FIRST WALES
ACCREDITATION
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**ACCREDITATION REPORT
CONWY AND DENBIGHSHIRE
HOUSING FIRST PROJECT
AUGUST 2020**

CONTENTS

1. Introduction	3
2. Methodology	6
3. Evidence	8
4. Reporting on principles and fidelity	10
5. Accreditation recommendation and conclusion	29
6. Panel comments and additions	30
7. Awarding	34
8. Glossary	35

1. INTRODUCTION

Housing First is a recovery-oriented approach to ending homelessness that centres on quickly moving people experiencing homelessness into independent and permanent housing and then providing additional support as needed. The concept has been applied most specifically with people who are sleeping rough or at least very marginally housed, and who have chronic and complex support needs. It was developed in New York in the 1990s, primarily by community psychologist Sam Tsemberis. Tsemberis found that providing housing to vulnerable clients who were living on the streets, without the kinds of preconditions usually implemented in approaches to reducing homelessness, had a hugely beneficial impact on the clients' lives.

Over the years, robust international evidence has proven 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 to access and maintain accommodation for the long term.

In order to have the greatest possible impact, it is vital that projects calling themselves Housing First, or claiming to deliver this approach, are doing so in accordance with the Housing First principles for Wales. There are, of course, many people and projects doing fantastic work across the country, which don't happen to be Housing First. But those that claim to be Housing First must adhere to the principles.

These principles were developed by the Housing First Wales Network, based on international definitions and building on work by Homeless Link in England. The Network wanted to make sure that the Housing First principles being used in Wales were appropriate for the Welsh context.

The principles are shown in a table on page three. They can also be found online in English and Welsh, with more detail about what they mean in practice and a basic scoring system for support providers to assess their fidelity to these principles. Evidence clearly demonstrates that when Housing First's principles are followed, the approach is at its most effective.

Additionally, a flow chart of the accreditation process on the next page lays out the main steps taken in the lead-up to the creation of this report. The next section of the report covers specific methodology when it comes to data gathering.

DEVELOPING THE ACCREDITATION

As the development and delivery of Housing First projects in Wales increased, it became clear that a mechanism to ensure fidelity with the principles would be required. As such, the role of Housing First Policy and Practice Co-ordinator (hereafter referred to as ‘the Co-ordinator’) was funded by Welsh Government, to work within Cymorth Cymru. With the support of colleagues, and the Housing First Wales Network, the Co-ordinator developed an Assessment Framework, to evaluate a Housing First project’s fidelity to the principles listed above.

This report details the findings and outcome of this Assessment Framework being applied to the Conwy Denbighshire Housing First project. This project is delivered in partnership by Conwy County Council and Denbighshire County Council.

It should be noted that this report does not seek to evaluate the effectiveness of Housing First as a model, which has been done repeatedly over many years - nor does it seek to evaluate the ‘quality’ of the support delivered within the Conwy Denbighshire Housing First project. This is for the commissioning body to monitor and ensure. The view taken by the Housing First Network Wales, and the Co-ordinator, is that if a project delivers Housing First according to the principles above, it is likely to deliver support in an effective way, transforming lives in the process.

THE PROCESS

PRE STAGE

Initial conversations with provider.

STAGE ONE

Commitments agreement signed; documents sent to Co-ordinator.
Interview plan agreed and carried out according to Assessment Framework.

STAGE TWO

Interim Recommendations Report shared with provider. Recommendations phase.

STAGE THREE

Final Report shared with Accreditation Panel. Final accreditation decision made.

HOUSING FIRST PRINCIPLES

1. 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.
2. Housing and support are separated.
3. The service is targeted at individuals 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.
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 to substance misuse 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, and as such has an explicit commitment to a small caseload.
10. 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.

2. METHODOLOGY

This research was carried out as per the Housing First Wales Accreditation Assessment Framework, devised by the Housing First Policy and Practice Co-ordinator in partnership with the Housing First Wales Network and the Welsh Government.

POINT OF CONTACT AND EVIDENCE SOURCES

- Main point of contact (Sue Stevenson, Housing First Team Manager), agreed upon and liaised with the Co-ordinator throughout the process.
- Evidence for adherence to each principle comes from two sources:
 - Documentation provided by the Conwy Denbighshire Housing First Team
 - Interviews carried out by the Co-ordinator

THE INTERVIEWS

- The Co-ordinator interviewed eight professionals who worked directly with the project, or had more indirect involvement - members of the wider local authority who attend Steering Group meetings, for example, as well as the line manager of the Housing First Team Manager.
- One client was interviewed who is currently living in a Housing First tenancy.
- A less formal conversation was held with another client which helped inform the report but was not gathered via recording.
- In all interviews except the informal one, consent forms were signed and interviews recorded.
- Four interviews were carried out in person - those with the client and most members of the Housing First team itself.
- The remaining five were carried out over the phone - one member of the team had just started working with them, but was familiar with the project from earlier consultancy work.

THE DOCUMENTATION

- Documentation was requested as per the Assessment Framework or identified by the Housing First Team Manager as being of use.
- In all cases, any identifying elements for specific service users were deleted from the documents.
- Documentation has been kept in a secure place and will be destroyed four months after completion of the accreditation process.

EVIDENCE TYPE, QUALITY AND SCORING

- Evidence from each type was catalogued in the Interim Recommendations Report, which has only been seen by the Co-ordinator, staff at the project, and key Cymorth Cymru staff for quality control purposes.
- Evidence sources divided into five types:
 - Internal policy documentation
 - External policy documentation
 - Practitioner interviews
 - External Interviews
 - Client interviews
- Evidence was scored as being very low, low, adequate, high or very high.
- Areas of concern were identified, and any issues with a particular principle were outlined in the Interim Recommendations Report.

RECOMMENDATION AND BEST PRACTICE PLAN

- Various recommendations were devised.
- In this case, given the early signs of fidelity to the model, these recommendations have taken the form of developing 'best practice', rather than required steps to receive accreditation.
- Recommendations and the Best Practice Action Plan were communicated to the Housing First Team Manager.
- For some points, the Housing First Team Manager provided evidence of what was being done to meet the recommendations already.
- In other examples, they expressed a commitment to specific actions based on the recommendations.
- In response, the Co-ordinator drew together timescales so it is clear when updates or evidence of action are expected.
- This evidence and / or action commitment was added to Recommendations Report.

FINAL REPORT PRODUCED

- This report formed the main piece of evidence which members of the Housing First Accreditation Panel will use as the basis of their decision whether to provide accreditation, or not, to the Conwy Denbighshire Housing First project.
- This report was provided to the team in Conwy Denbighshire and the appropriate contacts in Welsh Government, with an additional section to be drafted after the panel makes its decision.
- The Conwy Denbighshire team then decided whether to publish and share the report.

3. EVIDENCE

THE PRINCIPLES AND THE EVIDENCE

Before discussing the specific pieces of evidence and their relationship to particular principles, it is worth noting that the Conwy Denbighshire Housing First project was formed with a strong commitment to the entire set of principles at the core of its mission. This is perhaps most clearly exemplified in a report produced by Imogen Blood & Associates. The organisation was commissioned to devise an early project plan, and this plan clearly commits the project to adhering to all of the Housing First Wales principles.

Similarly, the documentation sent to Welsh Government as part of the bid to receive Trailblazer funding makes clear that the projects in Conwy and Denbighshire will work according to each principle.

Although these two documents were not considered as direct evidence of fidelity to a particular principle, they nonetheless demonstrate a strong foundation for the work being done across the two local authority areas.

FIDELITY EVIDENCE LEVEL SCORING

In the following text, the evidence level was scored according to the following options:

Very low

Low

Adequate

High

Very high

Categories of evidence based on sources were as follows:

Abbreviation	Evidence Type
IPD	Internal policy document - a document governing the way Housing First is implemented, created within the Housing First team itself.
EPD	External policy document - a document governing or affecting the way Housing First is implemented, created by an organisation or individual outside the Housing First team (the local authority, for example).
PI	Practitioner interview - an interview carried out with a member of the Housing First team, who has experience delivering the service on a day-to-day basis.
EI	External interview - an interview carried out with someone outside the Housing First team itself, but who is a stakeholder when it comes to the delivery of Housing First (some interviewees, for example, worked for a different part of the local authority, but sat on the Housing First Steering Group).
CI	Client interview - an interview carried out with a client, service user, or citizen, receiving support from the Housing First team and either accommodated or waiting to be accommodated in Housing First accommodation.

RECOMMENDATION EVIDENCE LEVEL

The evidence provided in response to the recommendations has also been scored, but using a simpler scale than the evidence relating to an entire principle. (It is worth noting again that the recommendations made to the Conwy Denbighshire Housing First projects should be classed as 'best practice' recommendations, rather than recommendations that affect the accreditation).



Additionally, the timescale agreed for recommendations to be acted on have been graded as follows:

Timescale	Duration
Short-term	Up to six months
Medium-term	Six to twelve months
Long-term	More than a year

4. REPORTING ON PRINCIPLES AND FIDELITY

PRINCIPLE ONE EVIDENCE LEVEL

High

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.

Summary notes

As per the Recommendations Report, the evidence level score for principle one was 'high'. Evidence of each of the five types specified in said report was provided: internal and external policy documents, internal and external interviews, and client interviews. Issues in the 'areas of concern', however, reduced the evidence level from the highest score of 'very high'.

There are aspects of external documentation that support this first principle. The Anti-Social Behaviour policy, for example, makes clear that eviction is a 'last resort'; the Denbighshire Community Housing Income Collection document references 'secure' homes. The Property Allocation Virtual Meeting notes make clear that HF tenants should not be treated any differently from any other tenants.

All interviewees made clear that clients didn't have to commit to anything beyond 'staying in touch' with the HF team in order to secure their tenancy - what this 'staying in touch' looks like might vary, and is largely down to the individual. One interviewee suggested that the team wouldn't be able to give clients a choice if they didn't know what a client wanted, so a basic level of interaction is necessary. To make staying in touch easier, tenants will be given mobile phones that are topped up with credit, and told to text if they need anything. This way, clients can take the lead when they feel they need support. In fact, one interviewee pointed out that tenants are sometimes surprised at how little they have to commit to doing when they move in to their property. The client interviewed was emphatic about not having to sign up to anything, or commit to any particular services beyond the tenancy agreement.

Several interviewees who worked outside the Housing First team contrasted Housing First with their statutory work on reducing homelessness. They contrasted the commitments that clients need to make when engaging with Housing Options, for example, with the absence of such commitment needed in Housing First. Staff within the team also discussed very recent examples of clients declining to meet with their support worker, but texting to explain that everything was alright.

The team will work with tenants to begin Universal Credit claims if necessary. The properties are also scattered, covering a large area across the two counties; some properties are situated in anecdotally sought-after areas. Most interviewees, when asked, emphasised the distance between properties. The team works with Registered Social Landlords to ensure that the accommodation is safe and secure and up to a 'very high standard', as one person put it.

I was told that in one case, the Housing First team deemed the property sub-par, so they worked with the RSL to split the cost of renovations.

The team makes sure homes have what they need and will make sure they know where duplicate keys are, for example, so people are never locked out in unsafe positions. The client with whom I spoke had decided to move out of his property because of issues with a neighbour. The team were assisting the client in doing this, and it was emphasised to me that this move was the client's choice.

Areas of concern or mitigation

There are no mentions of Housing First specifically in the Denbighshire Common Housing Allocation Policy, though there are mentions of the statutory requirement of social landlords to help reduce homelessness. This is, in some ways, outside of the control of the HF team, and is part of a wider conversation that the Housing First Network is attempting to start with local authorities.

Several interviewees mentioned a general lack of accommodation in the area - again, this is an issue affecting the entire country. The fact that this is mentioned, however, highlights the need for effective allocation policies that recognise the value of Housing First. The Chair of the Housing First Network has sent emails to Welsh local authorities asking about their allocation policies, so a separate piece of work is being undertaken to investigate this area.

Interviewees told me that some clients have had to be accommodated in bed and breakfast accommodation while waiting for their Housing First properties, but this situation is improving.

Recommendations

Timescale: Short-medium term

1. Ensure that when B&B accommodation is used, support workers are empowered to challenge quality of accommodation, and ensure that local authorities are aware and monitoring the situation so that the stay does not become a long one.

Timescale: Medium-Long term

2. Developing buy-in from the PRS should continue. Work with local authority and RSLs to ensure that there are enough properties opening up to Housing First
3. Apply for Housing First projects to be funded through the Revenue Support Grant (RSG) or other means to facilitate ongoing and long-term support.

Response to recommendations

The Housing First Team Manager has committed to working on these recommendations.

The Housing First Team Manager has sent me a monitoring checklist that will be used to make sure temporary accommodation being used for potential Housing First tenants is of good quality. This checklist will be used when a client moves into temporary accommodation, and later during the stay. That said, it is concerning that bed and breakfast accommodation is being used at all - something the Housing First team in Conwy Denbighshire agrees with.

The Team Manager hopes that the entire set of strategies for dealing with RSLs (like the Landlord Forum, and the presentations already mentioned) and the fact that at some point, a set of properties from the PRS should be made available, will help the area move entirely away from the use of temporary accommodation and, in particular, bed and breakfasts, for Housing First clients.

The team has already started to contact local PRS landlords to arrange viewings and start building relationships, and will develop an effective pathway for working with the PRS effectively. This should, in theory, lead to more properties being available for Housing First. I have been sent email evidence of viewing appointments being made with local PRS landlords, with some discussion of property purchasing in evidence too.

When it comes to the second recommendation, the team is already working on an exit strategy for when the initial Welsh Government funding stops. As such, this might include avenues like the Revenue Support Grant.

The Housing First Team Manager will update the Co-ordinator on these actions, leading up to the summer.

Recommendations evidence rating: High.

PRINCIPLE TWO EVIDENCE LEVEL

High

Housing and support are separated.

Summary notes

The evidence level for this principle was deemed as 'high'. It was represented in every evidence type except the client interview.

Several Housing Associations in Conwy and Denbighshire have signed the Housing First Management Charter (developed by the Housing Management sub group of the Housing First Network Wales) which clearly outlines the role of the social landlord in a Housing First project, and its separation from support provision. The Housing First Property Allocation Guidance clearly also explains that housing management, and specific tenancy arrangements, will be in place and separate to the support provided by the HF team.

I learned from interviews that the Housing First team develop good relationships with Housing Officers, but in terms of actual work, the management of the housing and the support are completely separate - this concept, and the phrase 'completely separate', came up unprovoked in at least one interview. When necessary, the HF team attend housing associations meetings to represent the client and to ensure they are kept abreast of any major developments. A member of the HF team pointed out that they have no involvement in the actual tenancy setup, although they may take clients to sign the tenancy agreements, and (as previously mentioned) assist clients in setting up social security claims. This person highlighted the mediation/advocacy role they would play on behalf of clients.

Areas of concern and mitigation

One interviewee pointed out that building relationships with housing officers was a 'work in progress', so I get the impression more needs to be done here. It seems that in some cases, staff in Housing Associations (and other organisations) have certain ways of working and certain perspectives that have developed over a considerable length of time, and are firmly embedded. Changing such a culture is difficult, and the Housing First team is trying to achieve this by giving presentations about Housing First, tailored to specific audiences.

I accept the fact that Housing First clients should be signing tenancy agreements that are the same as any other tenant's. It is worth noting, however, that the tenancy agreements signed by Housing First clients include no references to the separation of housing and support. It could be argued, however, that this is mitigated by a Housing Association's signing of the Charter, however, as it acts as further documentation outlining the relationship between landlord and tenant.

Recommendations

Timescale: Short-medium term

4. Continue with presentations, looking for particularly problematic areas and addressing them.
5. As HF rolls out further, ensure that service monitoring specifically asks about separation of housing and support, and that commissioner acts on examples of the boundaries being blurred.

Response to recommendations

The team have committed to continuing an initiative that has already shown some success: delivering awareness-raising presentations about Housing First to specific audiences who might have a stake in it - the police, for example, or PRS landlords. Continuing to do this to develop awareness should help change attitudes - and the team now has dedicated resource to do it. The Co-ordinator will follow up on future presentations and audience response.

The team has committed to developing a Housing First Landlord Forum, and will consist of front line housing officers from RSLs (and, in future, the PRS) meeting with Housing First staff to build relationships, receive local updates, and examine case studies to develop a sense of good practice, as well as dealing with challenges. I have been sent examples of the presentations that have been developed, and the first Housing First Landlord Forum is to take place on April 16th 2020. Additionally, some social landlords in the area have signed the Housing First Management Charter.

I have been sent a draft of Operational Guidance, which clearly delineates the difference between what the Housing First team do, and what the role for RSLs and other landlords is. This guidance will be taken to the next Landlord Forum, as mentioned above, for development and input from key stakeholders representing local housing providers.

Recommendations evidence rating: High

The service is targeted at individuals 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.

Summary notes

There were many examples of the projects in Conwy and Denbighshire working with the typical client group most suited to Housing First. The evidence level has been scored 'high' and there were examples of evidence from every category.

At the Multi-Agency Strategy meeting, the group discussed an individual who had been entrenched for some time. The person's vulnerability and mental health needs also arose. The waiting list spreadsheet contains details of clients, and it's clear that they are suited for Housing First and fall into the target client group. It is encouraging to see that there is some urgency highlighted in some of the requests for accommodation, based on the vulnerable situation some of the people are experiencing.

The Intake Group Meeting minutes show a frank, open discussion about the suitability of specific clients for HF, and the fact that suitable candidates should be in need of housing and support. The entire discussion, in fact, demonstrates an awareness of how important this third principle is. What's more, the HF Criteria Matrices show a clear commitment to providing HF for the target client group. In each category, the 'worse' or 'more chaotic' a person scores, the more likely they are to be considered suitable. As such, candidates who might be seen as the most 'risky' for other services are the people most likely to be accepted into Housing First accommodation - which is as it should be.

The Property Allocation Virtual Meeting notes references the Management Charter and the fact that there was a process for RSLs to sign it.

All interviewees agreed that the tenants in the projects and on the waiting list are in the correct target client group. Several people discussed the fact that these clients had been repeatedly failed by the system, and in some cases had been on the streets for over a decade. These failures contribute to the fact that it takes time to build relationships with clients, and active engagement is needed over time. One person put it like this: the HF team takes a 'we're not going anywhere' approach, while everyone else who had supported the client in the past 'had already left'.

Several interviewees pointed out something I had originally missed or underestimated - the fact that, whether or not this is seen as a specific criterion for the target client group, clients in Conwy and Denbighshire tended to have had many interactions with the criminal justice system.

One person discussed a client who had not been sleeping rough for that long, but scored highly on the matrix. The matrix was, in fact, adjusted so it did not exclude people who hadn't been on the streets for extended periods, provided they scored highly in the other areas. In the past, potential clients who were deemed to not be truly entrenched were not accepted into the project. As such, the adjusting of the matrix was an attempt to rectify this, which highlights the fact that the project continues to develop, and staff learn from their experiences.

The client interviewed described a history of rough sleeping and short prison sentences.

Areas of concern and mitigation

There were no areas of concern recorded in relation to this principle.

Recommendations

There were no recommendations made associated with this principle.

PRINCIPLE FOUR EVIDENCE LEVEL

Very high

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

Summary notes

Evidence from each category was provided to demonstrate fidelity to principle two, and the evidence level has been scored as 'very high'. The flexibility of support, and the diverse forms it can take, was one of the most clearly emphasised aspects of the interviews I carried out, as well as much of the documentation provided to me.

In the Multi-Agency Strategy meeting, there are references to support workers being on call every night, and meeting with clients daily. The Denbighshire Community Housing Income Collection document recognises issues of affordability among some tenants. The Housing First Property Allocation Guidance mentions 'intensive support' and the '24/7' availability of staff. The Property Allocation Virtual Meeting notes repeatedly reference flexible, intensive support, delivered and available in 'real time'. Support plans show the variety in client goals, and have no time constraints associated with them.

Interviewees provided several examples of support being flexible and person-centred. Some of the examples in the harm reduction section would also count for this principle. Additionally, staff all agreed that they were supported by senior staff to work on their own initiative in this area. Members of staff operate an on-call system, so support is available 24/7, 365 days a year. The team call this 'real-time support' or 'real-time response'. The 'tag team'/'buddy' system was referenced as sometimes caseloads can be very demanding, so multiple people need to be aware of a client's context.

One interviewee pointed out that different clients have different definitions of success, and will be supported to reach their successes. She also explained that support workers know from the start their days won't follow a set structure or be the same each time. Members of staff were encouraged and empowered to work together and share problems. The team has also engaged with clients while they were in hospital, working to sort accommodation for when they were discharged. Another interviewee pointed out that HF clients can take a while to engage, and things need to be done at their pace.

Specific examples of different kinds of support were discussed. One client, for instance, liked animals and nature so much that support workers found it best to take them to feed nearby ducks while talking.

The client interviewed discussed the support they had been provided with, and how the team did everything around their needs. No time constraints had been discussed - in fact, the team were suggesting that the client slow down in the pursuit of their goals.

Areas of concern and mitigation

Several interviewees mentioned the tension that exists between offering support with no time limits or constraints, and the fact that funding is by its nature limited to specific timescales. This doesn't seem to be affecting staff on the ground, however: clearly all the staff involved work in commitment of the principle. Commissioners ideally need to find a way to provide longer term commitments to funding Housing First projects - something that is true across Wales.

Recommendations

Timescale: Long-term

6. Work with commissioners to ensure HF, the lack of time constraints for support, and the fact that different clients will have different goals, are properly understood.
7. Make representations to Welsh Government around longer-term funding for HF projects, or request reassurance from WG about longevity of funds.

Response to recommendations

The Housing First Team Manager has committed to developing a Housing First policy that makes clear how Housing First works, and how its effectiveness should be assessed only on tenancy sustainment. This policy will be shared in May.

Representatives of Cymorth Cymru will meet with the team manager to discuss how to take forward the conversation with Welsh Government and/or local authorities about longer-term funding. Some of this work might be subsumed into Cymorth Cymru's existing wider lobbying strategies, but if there are any specific pieces of work that can be done in conjunction with the Housing First projects in Conwy and Denbighshire, this will be explored fully.

Recommendations evidence rating: Adequate

PRINCIPLE FIVE EVIDENCE LEVEL

Very high

An active engagement approach is used.

Summary notes

This evidence level was scored as 'very high', with examples of all five evidence categories. It is clear that members of the Housing First team working in Conwy and Denbighshire work very hard to build relationships and engage with clients and potential clients; members of other teams recognise this and were very positive in their comments about this.

The Housing First Property Allocation Guidance mentions 'citizen engagement' and working with people to help accept HF. The HF Board Meeting notes mention that HF support workers regularly visit known spots in the town to build relationships with potential tenants. These minutes also mention a 'Housing First Hub' drop-in. The Allocation Virtual meeting notes mention how the HF team meets clients and potential clients to build up trust and relationships - something that several interviewees focussed on when talking to me.

The team apparently works so hard to engage with clients on the streets that it can, according to one interviewee, 'look like [the team] are being manipulated'. The team will provide cigarettes to potential clients to open a dialogue while the client smokes. Even after taking 'a lot of abuse', the team will politely say that they'll be back tomorrow, or will be in a cafe up the road, if the person wants to talk. Then, when the person does want to talk, it's clear a line has been drawn under the abuse that took place earlier.

The time taken to build trust and relationships was highlighted several times. One interviewee highlighted the 'we'll always be back tomorrow' ethos. They also mentioned the idea that the team might be told, by another service, of a particular client, 'we've tried that, it won't work' - often, apparently, one finds that this isn't true. This respondent also said that, living in a home, they had the option of closing the front door on someone they didn't want to engage with. The team respects people on the streets if they want to do the same: the team will stop pressing people when necessary, but make it clear that they're there if people decide they want to talk.

Another person, outside the team, mentioned the team staff 'working tirelessly, day in day out'. The client's description of the HF team visiting him in prison shows how actively they engage. One member of the team highlighted the ethos of working with people who hadn't been accommodated yet as if they were in a property - that is, there is no less support, or dedication from the team, just because someone isn't yet in a property.

I accompanied members of the team as they worked with clients who weren't yet accommodated, and could see the positive relationships that they were developing in a variety of ways.

Areas of concern and mitigation

There were no areas of concern recorded in relation to this principle.

Recommendations

There were no recommendations made associated with this principle.

Individuals have choice and control.

Summary notes

This principle has an evidence level of 'very high', with examples from every evidence category.

In the Multi-Agency Strategy meeting notes, the client being discussed has clearly listed places in which they want to live. It seems that this choice is going to be followed. The HF Property Allocation Guidance mentions letting clients view properties before accepting them - something also highlighted in interviews. The process flow chart in the document also clearly allows for clients turning down properties.

One interviewee working within the Housing First team used this phrase to describe their work: 'wrap-around support that is choice-based'. This person emphasised the role of choice in ensuring people can make meaningful changes - ones they are invested in. Choice could mean something as 'small' as deciding whether they want help cleaning their property.

The idea of people choosing their furniture came up repeatedly. We talked about the idea that people are more likely to take care of things that they've taken ownership of, or chosen for themselves. In one interview, we discussed a client who wanted their property decorated in black, with a black fridge, and so on. The team worked to make sure this happened. The client I interviewed made clear in what order their rooms would be decorated - the team abided by choice at this level of detail.

In another case, the team took the lead in decorating for a client who hadn't taken much interest in the process. This client had served in the merchant navy and as such, the team put photos of ships on the walls - ships the client would know and remember. The client was very pleased. This is an example of the team considering the client during a process that could have been done without such thought, given that the client hadn't made any specifications. (This would count as evidence for principle eight, too).

Some interviews mentioned the budget for furniture that clients were allocated, and the fact that clients could take an active role in the decoration of their home, or no role at all. Another person emphasised the fact that a client is asked about where they'd like to live first, rather than being given a list of properties which they then choose from. The client agreed that they had choice and control when it came to where they lived, how they decorated the place, and other aspects of their support.

Areas of concern and mitigation

Some interviewees, referring to a general lack of accommodation in the local area, highlighted the need to manage expectations when it came to area choice. The team had to be open with clients about the fact that they might need to wait for properties in certain areas. Ideally, more properties would be available for Housing First, as has already been stated.

One person pointed out that while it isn't hard to offer clients some level of choice and control, this limited availability of properties restricts choice. Apparently, getting properties is becoming slightly easier, but it remains an issue.

Recommendations

Timescale: Short-medium term

8. Consider the creation of a “choice log”, for commissioners, where individuals’ initial choices are recorded, and then any reasons for that choice not being granted are recorded for potential review or spot-check.

Response to recommendations

The team has, in response to this assessment and the Recommendations Report, drawn up a Choice Log to record the choices made by clients, and actions taken on those choices. This document will now be a part of standard project practice. Accommodation choices are already recorded as a matter of course. Using the Choice Log will enable the team to make sure that they are acting on the choices of their tenants to the greatest possible extent, and enable external auditors to be able to check this process, when necessary.

Recommendations evidence rating: High

PRINCIPLE SEVEN EVIDENCE LEVEL

High

A harm reduction approach to substance misuse is used.

Summary notes

The evidence level has been scored as 'high'. This principle was evidenced in three of the five evidence categories: internal policy documents, practitioner interviews, and external interviews.

The 'standard' or expected kinds of harm reduction came up in interviews - where necessary, for example, sharps bins will be provided to people, and there are needle exchange facilities.

However, more novel kinds of harm reduction were also discussed. For example: the team call a taxi in the afternoon to pick up a client who drinks on a bench in town, so the taxi can take the client home. This means the client is less likely to be arrested later in the day, as often happened in the past as they continued drinking in public. This reduces harm to the client and to the criminal justice system. This was reinforced by a different interviewee, who mentioned a drop in the number of arrests of many HF clients.

Another interviewee mentioned working with the local substance misuse team to support a client. Several interviewees mentioned that they have recommended weaker drinks to their clients, or suggested drinking five pints instead of six. Some mentioned small reductions in substance or alcohol use, with one person saying that once a person is accommodated, harm reduction tends to happen 'by default', thus highlighting one of the potential positive 'by-products' of Housing First, outside of tenancy maintenance statistics.

Areas of concern and mitigation

It has already been accepted that the tenancy agreements signed by Housing First clients are the same as those signed by general needs tenants. That said, there is little room for harm reduction in these agreements. It should be noted that the legislative framework in the UK, to which agreements like this must adhere, limits the scope of harm reduction in some areas. Additionally, there is some mitigation in the fact that some local Housing Associations have signed the Housing First Management Charter, which outlines the need for a harm reduction approach in Housing First.

Recommendations

Timescale: Short-medium term

9. Ensure that local commissioners and projects have worked with the local police force to arrange an acceptable way forward with this area.

Response to recommendations

Historically, a police officer has attended the Housing First Steering Group meetings. Given the fact that the nature of this group will be changing, and the board will become more operationally-driven (see the discussion of principle ten), it is important that this inclusion of local police officers continues: the team will request a beat officer to attend Operational Task Group meetings (this is the name for the relaunched Steering Group). A member of the team will continue to attend monthly police network meetings to build relationships and continue dialogue about specific clients.

Recommendations evidence level: High

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

Summary notes:

The evidence level for principle seven is 'high'. There is evidence from all categories except the client interview; this has not been deemed concerning, as the conversation didn't refer to PIE and trauma specifically. The absence of this evidence is not evidence of the absence of a PIE approach. It should be noted that there is considerable overlap between the evidence provided for this principle, the flexibility of support (principle four), and the strength-based approach (principle nine).

The tenancy agreements include a reference to domestic violence. Similarly, the Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) policy references supporting vulnerable people to retain their homes and prevent homelessness. It also mentions working closely with the relevant agencies to support victims of domestic violence and ensure their safety. There are also references in the ASB policy to vulnerable people and drug use, mental health issues, and family breakdown/abuse. There are also mentions of the Equalities Act 2010, so there is some awareness of protected characteristics. The Denbighshire Common Allocations Policy mentions protected characteristics. What's more, the allocations policy makes clear the fact that applicants for housing do not need to attend in person to apply, but can do so over the phone, or from hospital, etc. This shows some flexibility in local authority processes, and an awareness of how important it is to consider the physical and mental issues that might prevent someone from attending Housing Options offices to apply for housing.

The Denbighshire Community Housing Income Collection document also references protected characteristics. The Safeguarding Children and Adults policy references vulnerable people, and protecting people from various harms and issues; it also mentions protected characteristics. The HF Board Meeting notes mention the aim of recruiting a peer mentor from HF properties to work with other tenants. Although this hadn't yet happened, according to the minutes, it's a laudable idea - one that was also mentioned during several interviews. Someone who has experienced things that Housing First tenants might be dealing with might be more likely to consider a tenant's mental health situation, and to provide support accordingly. The Property Allocation Virtual meeting notes also mention tailoring support to individuals in a person-centred way.

Many of those interviewed clearly articulated what Psychologically-Informed Environments (PIE) and trauma-informed approaches meant to them, explaining for example that just because someone seemed to be 'acting out', it didn't necessarily happen because they were trying to be 'difficult'. One person highlighted non-judgemental approaches and emphasised the role of empathy. One interviewee lamented the fact that 'PIE' and 'trauma-informed' had almost become 'buzzwords'. Ultimately, this person explained, 'PIE' and 'trauma-informed' refer to being non-judgemental and treating people as anyone would want to be treated, with the ethos of 'we'll always be back tomorrow'. Treating people with respect and dignity, I was told, is key. One person explained that PIE, essentially, means not labelling people.

One interviewee made a reference to people being able to choose a male or female support worker. With regards to gender-informed work, the Housing First team is apparently situated in the same directorate as the team that would provide support with domestic violence. theory, then, it should be simple to get the teams to interact and to get the right support when necessary.

In a specific example of working according to a client's needs, one interviewee told me about a client who mentioned that they hadn't received a birthday card in years. The HF team got this person a birthday card which the client has kept for a long time. It should also be noted that several interviewees mentioned PIE and trauma without prompting, which demonstrates the strong understanding of these concepts, and engagement with them, across the team.

Cymorth Cymru has produced a document explaining PIE's key aspects. There is evidence for each aspect: the support clients receive is clearly based on their psychological framework. Feedback and input from staff and clients alike is used in a way that generates evidence. The physical environment in client homes is a clear focus when it comes to support and putting a tenant at ease. Staff feel supported, although there is scope for expanding what is offered, as is explained in the recommendations and response part of this section. Finally, strong relationships are developed between stakeholders in these projects.

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Areas of concern and mitigation

Although the Tenancy Agreements signed by tenants are the same as any other general needs tenants would sign, the language in these agreements is not trauma-informed or person-centred, but quite daunting and enforcement-oriented. Some of the language in the ASB policy is not very trauma-informed - phrases like 'unacceptable behaviour', for example, are used. While this is in part mitigated where Housing Associations in Conwy and Denbighshire have signed the Housing First Management Charter, this issue is worth noting, even if it goes beyond Housing First to an extent.

Although all staff feel fully supported by their managers to act on their own initiative and deliver support in the best way they can, one aspect of a PIE approach is missing: staff are not formally supported, by an external organisation or individual, to deal with any deferred trauma they might have experienced from working with HF clients. I became clearly aware that members of the team often hear potentially disturbing stories that might cause secondary or vicarious trauma in themselves.

Ideally, as several interviewees mentioned, clinical appointments with a psychologist would be offered to staff in this situation. Similarly, although the team is clearly close-knit and members support each other, a clearer commitment to reflective practice would be good to see. One member of staff admitted that although some training in this area was provided, including the PATH sessions, this is an area where the project could do better.

Additionally, developing a more formalised discussion of how the team would take a gender-informed approach would be a positive step.

Recommendations

Timescale: Short-medium term

10. There should be more evidence of a gender-informed support provision, although I accept this may not have been relevant with the clients so far.
11. More training into aspects of PIE should be offered to members of staff.

Response to recommendations

The Housing First Team Manager has committed to updating the Support Plans used to develop the support approach to clients, ensuring that there is a clearer commitment to gender-informed provision from the start. This will be done by April, and I will follow up on this work.

Additionally, senior staff in the team will be developing an induction module covering PIE that will be taken by all staff involved in delivering Housing First in any capacity. The manager will also work with other senior staff to identify suitable counselling training which all staff will take. I will work to stay apprised of this work as it develops, working with the project to continue to develop a psychologically informed approach that aligns with the five aspects of PIE.

Recommendations evidence level: Adequate

PRINCIPLE NINE EVIDENCE LEVEL

Very high

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

Summary notes

The evidence level for the ninth principle is 'very high', and evidence is represented in each category.

The Denbighshire Community Housing Income Collection document references a 'customer-centred' approach. The Safeguarding Children and Adults policy points out that an aim in the council is for vulnerable people to 'live as independently as possible'. As has been discussed, the HF Property Allocation Guidance mentions taking clients to view properties before choosing whether to accept them - this is person-centred work, because it ensures that properties are right for clients. The Property Allocation Virtual Meeting notes make clear that support should be tailored to individuals in a person-centred way.

Several interviewees mentioned different approaches to support for different people. Some of the examples in the 'choice and control' section clearly cover this principle, too; the decoration of a client's home with the pictures of ships, for example. Similarly, the fact that clients have different goals, and different ideas about 'success' is key here: one interviewee emphasised the fact that clients will be supported to reach their successes. I was also given the example of a client who enjoyed sport and physical activity, and maintaining their health. The team made sure to mention a new vegan cafe that had opened nearby. One interviewee mentioned that a client enjoyed walks on the beach, so this is where the support sessions took place.

During my visit to North Wales, the conversations between a client and their support worker clearly focused on strengths and abilities - the goal of being a fitness instructor, for example, as well as the number of training courses the client attended in prison. The conversation was realistic, but at the same time focused on goals instead of things that could hold a person back.

Areas of concern and mitigation

There were no areas of concern recorded in relation to this principle.

Recommendations

There were no recommendations made associated with this principle.

PRINCIPLE TEN EVIDENCE LEVEL

High

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.

Summary notes:

The evidence level for this principle was scored as 'high', with examples from every evidence category.

There is substantial evidence of a range of organisations and individuals being involved in the Housing First projects. The steering group is made up of participants from a wide range of services, including substance misuse, vulnerable people and the police, and multi-agency support plans are discussed at these meetings. The Anti-Social Behaviour policy includes a reference to working with other agencies to support clients falling foul of the policy. It also mentions 'multi-agency case conferencing'. Additionally, the ASB policy discusses working with external agencies to safeguard victims of domestic violence. The HF Steering Group (the Board) notes mention a colleague in the Job Centre implementing a 'fast track' approach for HF clients. The same minutes also demonstrate that the Board includes representatives from the police, nearby Job Centres, probation, vulnerable people, substance misuse services, and more.

Interviewees listed these various organisations too. Some more novel interaction between services was mentioned - the team has worked to obtain gym passes for clients, for example. One interviewee highlighted the involvement in the Housing First project of substance misuse services, probation and police, and a vulnerable people officer. Another highlighted a good working relationship with the police, particularly in Denbighshire. One interviewee mentioned some other agencies represented at meetings: the alcohol liaison; Kaleidoscope, DIP, The Wallich, the local night shelter, and other emergency accommodation services.

When I spoke to a client of the project, their story highlighted interaction between the HF team and the prison service, while the client was in custody, as well as subsequent relationships with probation and alcohol services. It was clear that members of the Housing First team will ensure they develop good working relationships with any other organisations or individuals who might be able to provide support to a client, and will proactively work to involve them.

Areas of concern and mitigation

Several interviewees mentioned a comparative lack of buy-in from mental health representatives, although attempts have been made to engage them. Most interviewees who discussed this issue explained that they understood how much pressure there might be on the NHS, and how it might be difficult for them to get involved in another initiative. Much of this is beyond the control of the Housing First team.

Nevertheless, when it comes to delivering Housing First, the lack of engagement on the part of mental health representatives remains an issue. One interviewee pointed out the danger of HF becoming 'tenancy support plus' without meaningful buy-in from substance misuse services and mental health in particular. Buy-in from mental health services needs to be built in at a strategic level or 'more from the top down', the interviewee said, though they allowed that the 'right noises' are coming from 'that direction'.

One interviewee mentioned Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder as a specific issue affecting some HF tenants. Proper mental health support is needed in cases like these. I was told of one client with suspected PTSD who has acute attacks, but because these attacks haven't been witnessed by a mental health representative, the client remains undiagnosed (and, therefore, untreated).

In Conwy, according to one interviewee, the police and other organisations haven't engaged quite as well as in Denbighshire. One person mentioned that the steering group (also known as the Board) as it currently operated 'didn't work', but that there were planned changes coming in April; the group in its new form will take a more 'hands-on' role, rather than simply receiving updates. This respondent also pointed out that potential funds had been identified to second staff from mental health and substance misuse services into the HF team.

Recommendations

Timescale: Medium-long term

12. Find ways to develop buy-in with mental health, potentially through a secondment.
13. Continue with changes to the board, making it less of an update receiving group and making it more hands-on.

Response to recommendations

The secondment of mental health staff is still planned. Additionally, the team manager has suggested lobbying Welsh Government for funding to cover clinical supervision for team members, so they can cope with secondary or vicarious trauma; this would also reinforce adherence to the PIE approach. The Team Manager has committed to updating me as to progress in this area.

The first meeting of the newly formed Operational Task Group, as opposed to the Steering Group, will take place in April. The aim of the new group is to be more hands-on when it comes to making decisions and steering the direction of support, as opposed to a group that merely receives updates. I will follow up with the Team Manager in early May to see how the first meeting has gone, and will continue to monitor this progress in securing a strategic commitment from the local health board, to facilitate rapid access to mental health services for the project clients.

Recommendations evidence level: Adequate

5. ACCREDITATION RECOMMENDATION AND CONCLUSION

I recommend that the Housing First projects in Conwy and Denbighshire be accredited as Housing First Wales projects.

Although there are small areas of concern for several principles, given the excellent evidence level scores (five 'high' and five 'very high'), as well as some of the mitigating factors, these should be regarded as 'best practice recommendations'. That is, while acting on the recommendations would be an example of Housing First best practice, the projects should still be accredited at this stage. This is reinforced by the range of evidence types across the principles. In interviews, it was clear to me that staff within and outside the Housing First team understand the approach. It was impressive to see staff doing statutory homelessness work contrast those approaches with Housing First, and understand why it works so well if delivered properly.

As the evidence above has shown, the team has already committed to action on many of the recommendations, and in some cases - like the underrepresentation of mental health within the project - they were already aware of the issues, and devising ways of addressing them. I have developed an action plan with the Housing First Team Manager and will be following up the various actions they have committed to over the coming months.

There are some examples here of issues affecting the sector across Wales - a lack of suitable properties, for example, as well as a lack of understanding of Housing First as an approach in some areas. This does not mean they should be ignored, however, and the Conwy Denbighshire projects have already been thinking about how to tackle such issues. Given its importance to the core principles, it is key that mental health are brought on board to a greater extent than they have been (it is worth noting, again, that efforts have already been, and continue to be, made in this area). Providing clinical support to staff, as per the PIE approach, should result in a healthier, happier team, although the hard work they put in to what they do has been apparent from the start.

6. PANEL COMMENTS AND ADDITIONS

As per the Panel's Terms of Reference, three members of the Panel met with the Housing First Policy and Practice Co-ordinator and Cymorth Cymru's Policy and External Affairs Manager. To make a final decision on accreditation, the Terms of Reference dictate that a majority of the panel members must agree on a decision.

The Panel spent most of the working day discussing this report and specific examples of practice for each principle. The Manager of the Housing First Team at the project joined the Panel to answer specific questions and shed more light on aspects of work the Panel had queries about.

The Panel identified several issues that will be part of a wider conversation about Housing First in Wales, facilitated by the Housing First Network. These will be outlined here, as well some of the questions that came up for the Team Manager but might be more linked to specific local practice.

LOCAL ISSUES RAISED DURING PANEL MEETING

Harm reduction

Members of the Panel asked Conwy and Denbighshire's Housing First Team Manager whether there had been any instances of tenants using drugs in a property, and this being raised as an issue with the relevant housing provider.

The Team Manager explained that this has not yet been the case; however, housing providers are thoroughly briefed about the Housing First approach and what it might mean for clients and what they choose to do in their homes, and the relationships developed between the Housing First team and said housing providers are strong. Additionally, many housing providers in the area have signed the Housing First Housing Management Charter, which discusses harm reduction. As such, the Team Manager does not envision this creating problems should it happen.

Prison recall

Members of the Panel asked the Team Manager from Conwy and Denbighshire to shed more light on the issue of clients being recalled to prison, and whether the offences they committed were pre- or post-Housing First accommodation. The Team Manager recalled a handful of instances of clients being recalled to prison, and in all cases the Housing First team continued to engage with these clients, working to ensure they would have accommodation waiting when they were released. No clients have been convicted of offences committed while they were Housing First tenants.

WIDER ISSUES TO TAKE TO THE NETWORK

Choice and control

There was discussion about Principle 5, and the meaning of Choice and Control. Although members of the Panel accepted the specific examples of working to meet clients' choices from the project working across Conwy and Denbighshire, they wanted to establish what systems were put in place to enable people to make choices when lacking capacity, or understanding of different options.

While this point is related specifically to practice in the project in question, it feeds into a wider consideration of how clients are communicated to about their choices.

The approach taken in the project is clear. After taking the potentially considerable time needed to build strong, trusting and lasting relationships with clients and potential clients, support workers would ensure that they communicated about each choice that might be available to the client, bearing the client in mind. Support workers will not highlight specific preferences, but will discuss choices with a client while thinking about that client's individual context. This was accepted as good practice by Panel members.

Aspirational, person-centred, strength-based support

There was a discussion about the meaning and implications of Principle 9, referring to aspirational, person-centred, strength-based support. The checklist associated with this principle lists the following scoring:

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.

It is worth noting that the Housing First principles were drawn up some time ago, and the context around the approach in Wales has developed since then. While the principle itself stands, there was agreement that the highest scoring point in the checklist above - which was still used for the purposes of this accreditation process - focuses on the commissioning element of Housing First above the day-to-day support provided to clients. As such, the nature of true goal-based support that focuses on a person's strengths and aspirations, rather than perceived deficits, needs to be thought through (and defined) by members of the Housing First Network, and the checklist above changed to reflect this.

Members of the Panel agreed that the Housing First project in Conwy and Denbighshire does offer strength-based, aspirational support. In particular, the example of the client wanting to become a fitness instructor, and the way staff have supported them as they identified this goal, were praised.

Local lettings policies, suitability orders for temporary accommodation, and their relationship with Housing First

It became apparent during discussion with the Housing First Team Manager that some local lettings policies enacted by RSLs can end up excluding Housing First clients from their properties because of past tenancy behaviour. As such, the Panel recommend the Network investigate the role of such policies across Wales.

Similarly, the team recognises that the use of temporary accommodation is not ideal. However, use of bed and breakfast and other temporary accommodation is still based on client choice. The temporary accommodation checklist developed by the team in response to Recommendation One seems to cover many of the same criteria listed in legislation: Suitability Orders, in particular, which govern certain minimum standards for temporary accommodation. The legislation also makes clear time limits for use of temporary accommodation, which Housing First providers should be aware of.

Discussing this fed into a wider conversation about the legal status of Housing First clients, and their relationship with duties mandated by the Housing (Wales) Act 2014. The Network will need to seek clarification from Welsh Government as to what legal duties apply to Housing First clients and potential clients during their journey into suitable accommodation. Currently, most if not all Housing First clients are accommodated outside the Housing (Wales) Act.

Responsibility for carrying out recommendations

Members of the Panel pointed out that some of the recommendations listed in this report, which were taken from the Interim Recommendations Report produced earlier in the process and shared with the Housing First team, are in some cases not the responsibility of that team, or sometimes not entirely the responsibility of the team.

This was specifically discussed in relation to Recommendation Four, which would in theory involve commissioners. Going forward, the Recommendations Reports, as well as the associated Action Plans, will make this clearer.

Housing supply

The Panel members discussed the issue of housing supply, and the general lack of properties available to Housing First providers (as well as for vulnerable people more generally). One of the reasons that the team is exploring avenues in the Private Rented Sector is that it would lead to more properties becoming available in the area. At present, members of the team need to communicate honestly with clients about the potential wait for the accommodation they want in the areas they might want. Given that property allocation is based on client choice, expectations need careful management, and depending on that choice, this might lead to the use of temporary accommodation (as has been discussed above) or a client remaining on the streets while they wait for a property. This is likely an issue affecting projects across the country, and more lobbying work is necessary to make clear the importance of more properties being available for approaches like Housing First.

GOOD PRACTICE FOR OTHER PROVIDERS

Good practice for statutory services

Several of the individuals interviewed were involved in the Housing First project due to their membership of what, has until now, been known as the Steering Group (see the section discussing Principle Ten for more information about how this group will develop going forward). Many of these people, when interviewed, contrasted elements of the Housing First approach with the approach to tackling homelessness mandated in Welsh Law; this phenomenon is described in more detail in the section on the evidence for Principle One.

Members of the Panel agreed that many of the approaches that have proved to be effective in the context of Housing First, could also be used by local authorities in the support they provide to people at risk of, or experiencing, homelessness. Such approaches include: taking the time to build relationships; accepting the fact that someone might not want to engage or speak at a particular time; and focusing on strengths as opposed to perceived weaknesses, among others.

One of the interviewees highlighted their perception of an ingrained culture among housing professionals. Whether or not this is true, there is an opportunity to use innovative and effective practice drawn from Housing First to make a difference to people using a variety of homelessness and housing services.

Good practice in documentation

Members of the panel asked about some of the specific documentation referred to in this report and during the meeting. It seems that some of these documents, and their development and use, are examples of good practice and could be used or repurposed by other support services. In particular, the Housing First Property Allocation Guidance, with the associated flow chart that demonstrates a process allowing clients to turn down properties, was highlighted (see the section on Principle Six). Similarly, the matrices used to assess potential clients interested the Panel members.

7. AWARDING

Cymorth Cymru, after meeting with the panel, was pleased to announce full accreditation to Conwy and Denbighshire Housing First Project.



Awarded by Cymorth Cymru:

- Alex Osmond (Housing First Policy and Practice Co-ordinator)
- Katie Dalton (Director)

With thanks to our Accreditation Panel:

- Claire Frew (Homelessness Network Scotland)
- Rebecca Jackson (Shelter Cymru, now Platfform)
- Joy Williams (Local Authority Housing Networks)

8. GLOSSARY

Various terms are used throughout the documents associated with the Housing First Wales Accreditation. So that different stakeholders understand exactly what we mean when we use certain phrases, we have devised this brief glossary. Any questions about the terms here should be addressed to the Housing First Policy and Practice Coordinator.

- **Active engagement/assertive outreach** - these terms refer to an approach to engaging with and communicating with clients or potential clients, whether they are experiencing or at risk of homelessness, or potentially suited to Housing First specifically. Essentially, working in an active or assertive way means a support worker should bear in mind that the person they are trying to reach might have many reasons not to want to engage. Some of these might be short-term and temporary while others might be more ingrained. While respecting the right of anybody not to engage with someone else, support workers should be willing to try different approaches with their clients - at the same time as working in a way that is trauma-informed and person-centred.

For example, a support worker might be on the receiving end of verbal abuse, and should make it clear that they are willing to draw a line under it if the client decides at any point they want to talk (while also making it clear that such abuse is not acceptable). Support workers, understanding that somebody might not want to talk to them at one moment, might tell a client that they will be sitting in a nearby café, should they change their mind. Support workers will need to be patient and understanding. A support worker might suggest a venue for speaking that they perceive would put a client most at ease - a local park, for example. Because many of the clients suited for Housing First will have been let down by the system repeatedly, active and assertive engagement means making clear that the same thing will not happen in this instance, and that the support worker will always be willing to talk; however a client is feeling, and whatever trauma they have internalised, 'the system' as represented by a support worker or outreach worker will be there for them when they are ready. Building relationships takes time, of course, and support workers should be prepared to put this time in.

Engaging in an assertive way means ensuring that the different organisations, individuals and agencies are committed to the same approach, so that it becomes a multi-disciplinary way of working. That said, it should be remembered that certain clients might have difficult relationships with certain organisations, and as such, the support offered should be separate from any specific organisation or agency.

Support workers and other people offering support should be willing to meet clients in a variety of settings - in a police station after an arrest, for example, or in a GP's surgery. Similarly, clients should be seen at a variety of times - people might swap shifts to see clients at night, for example, or in the early morning.

A key element of active engagement is that clients are offered a situation better than the one they are currently in - for example, they might prefer bed and breakfast accommodation to a hostel place. Support workers should, in effect, have a toolkit of approaches, in recognition of the fact that different clients might have very different needs and engage differently.

- **Choice and control** - these concepts are fundamental to the delivery of Housing First, but can mean a range of different things. In practice, choice and control refers to the support and accommodation being client-led. For example, choice might refer to the client expressing a preference for an area in which they want to live - but might equally refer to them taking the lead role in deciding how their home should be decorated.

Control means giving them an active role in these decision processes. The fact that Housing First imposes no conditions on tenants, beyond the basic requirements any tenancy agreement would impose, means that basic choices like whether to engage with a specific kind of support are down to the client.

It should be noted that, at a minimum, clients usually need to commit to at least having a conversation with a support worker at regular intervals. Housing First support workers often need to build relationships with clients, so that they can discuss the choices open to clients in a fair, open and non-judgemental way. As one Housing First worker has put it: “How can we know what a client wants if we don’t talk to them?”

Support workers should bear in mind that different clients will have different needs, and encourage them to make positive changes to their lives, while still respecting their decisions. This requires compassion, respect and understanding. Support workers should not offer help that clients do not need, and should be open and honest about the various choices that might exist at a particular point in time.

- **External organisation** - service, organisation or agency that is neither the support provider engaged in delivering Housing First, nor the landlord letting the accommodation, but is built into the Housing First project as a key stakeholder. See the definition for ‘stakeholder’, below.
- **Fidelity** - the extent to which a Housing First project aligns with the principles of the approach; in this case, the principles drawn up by the Housing First Network Wales.
- **Gender-informed approaches** - a service that, when planning and providing support, considers how a person’s perceived gender might affect their situation and support needs. It is more likely, for example, that a female sleeping rough has experienced domestic violence; this might necessitate ‘target hardening’ for their accommodation, or affect their choice of accommodation. Services should also be able to respond sensitively to requests for male or female support workers where appropriate.
- **Harm reduction** - policies and approaches aimed towards reducing the negative consequences of drug use, while emphasising the quality of life of an individual over the cessation of their drug use. A harm reduction approach accepts drug use a complex phenomenon and focuses on keeping people safe, and on the rights and needs of people who use drugs. For a more complete definition, visit this [page](#) at the Harm Reduction Coalition.
- **Housing First accredited project** - a service that adheres to the principles drawn up by the Housing First Network and has gone through the accreditation process before being awarded accreditation.
- **Housing First Network Wales** - the group of experts and practitioners in housing, homelessness, and related fields, who meet to oversee the implementation of Housing First across Wales, and how it can be carried out effectively.
- **Housing First Network Wales Accreditation** - sometimes abbreviated to ‘Accreditation’, it affirms that a project delivers Housing First according to the principles drawn up by the Housing First Network Wales. Organisations that do not receive accreditation do not deliver Housing First, but may well deliver an effective and necessary service.

- **Housing First target clients/client group** - This phrase will be used throughout the assessment process and associated documents. Housing First works most effectively with people who tend to experience issues with substance use and mental health. In many cases, but not exclusively, they will have experienced or be experiencing rough sleeping, or homelessness of some sort. They may have engaged with various services and organisations to varying extents.
- **Housing management** - A collection of activities taking place as part of the letting of a rented property; including, but not limited to, rent collection, housing maintenance, dealing with ASB, and resolving disputes with neighbours. Housing management tasks are usually carried out by a landlord, whether private or social.
- **Landlord** - the organisation or individual letting the accommodation to a Housing First client.
- **Potential Housing First project** - a project undergoing assessment for the Housing First accreditation.
- **Psychologically-informed approaches/environments** - support approaches and environments that take into account a person's psychological context, and work according to the five principles listed in this document, as well as reflective practice.
- **RSL Management Function** - the arm of a Registered Social Landlord acting as landlord according to the definition in this glossary. This will often involve activities such as collecting rent, addressing concerns or complaints about or from tenants, overseeing repair and maintenance and other similar duties.
- **Separation of housing and support** - In order to ensure closest adherence to the Housing First principles, there should be no undue influence on the way support is provided to clients. It must be accepted that the provision of housing is not conditional on engagement with support; people accessing Housing First need to be assured that the support provider is there to focus entirely on support issues, and this will not affect their housing. Housing management activities are to be kept as separate as possible - for example, support workers will not deliver or enforce such activities (rent collection, for instance, or ASB enforcement). They might, however, choose to discuss such issues with tenants, acting as advocates for the clients.
- **Service provider** - the organisation delivering the potential Housing First project support, as opposed to letting the accommodation itself. This may be abbreviated to 'provider' or 'provider organisation' in various documents.
- **Stakeholder** - any agency, organisation, group or individual involved in a Housing First project and therefore likely to be part of the accreditation process. These would include, but might not be limited to, the commissioning team, staff at the service provider, representatives of the health service, representatives of local mental health teams, representatives of local criminal justice, representatives of local substance misuse teams, and the tenants themselves, as well as clients who might be engaging with an organisation but who have not yet been accommodated in a Housing First property.
- **Trauma-informed approaches** - models that recognise the trauma that people have faced in their lives and structure systems around recognising and responding to that trauma. This definition comes from [AVA](#).

This is a living glossary - if you think other terms should be included, please contact us directly.



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