



**HOUSING
FIRST WALES
ACCREDITATION
ACHREDIAD TAI YN
GYNTAF CYMRU**

HOUSING FIRST WALES ACCREDITATION

INTERIM REFLECTIVE EXERCISE

CONWY DENBIGHSHIRE HOUSING FIRST

AUGUST 2025

INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

The Conwy Denbighshire service was the first Housing First service to receive official accreditation, after a thorough process that began soon after the accreditation process was developed by Cymorth Cymru, with input from Welsh Government and the Housing First Network Wales. Accreditation was awarded in summer 2020 – the process is discussed in detail in the [associated report](#). A follow-up [report](#) discussing the developing context surrounding each recommendation was finalised and discussed by members of the Housing First Network in January 2021.

This is the first instance of this reflective element of the accreditation, signed off by the Housing First Network, being carried out. The accreditation is supposed to be an ongoing, constructive and supportive journey for the services involved, and as such, this element of the overall process aims to strike a balance between a comprehensive re-evaluation of work already done and a lighter-touch informal series of learning opportunities. There is the acknowledgement that services delivering Housing First are carrying out difficult, intensive work on a day-to-day basis. The hope is that this reflective exercise can help foster learning and development on the part of services as the accreditation journey continues.

METHODOLOGY

The aim of this part of the process is to encourage ongoing reflection on learning and outcomes from the accreditation process, using the recommendations as a series of prompts. The reflective nature of this exercise means that the Housing First team at Cymorth Cymru act as facilitators, with the bulk of the work being carried out by the team at the Conwy Denbighshire Housing First service.

Two meetings were facilitated, at which Cymorth Cymru's Housing First Manager and Housing First Policy Officer were present, along with three members of the Conwy Denbighshire team, including the Manager. During these meetings, the nature of this exercise was made clear and agreed upon. Next, the original recommendations were discussed. The team in Conwy Denbighshire had its own series of reflective conversations between the two meetings, focusing on the recommendations, areas of learning and good practice, and interesting or noteworthy case studies. The team subsequently came up with some specific aims that they wanted to focus on over the next couple of years. The second meeting summed up these discussions and involved any remaining questions being answered and points clarified.

The material has been assembled into this report, which will be shared with the team in Conwy Denbighshire, Welsh Government, and – should the team allow it – the Housing First Network and the wider public via Cymorth Cymru's website.

ORIGINAL AND RECENT SELF-EVALUATION SCORES

At the start of the accreditation process, services are asked to self-evaluate their score for each principle, based on the criteria in the principle documentation. This is a useful exercise for a team, to reflect on the fidelity they are delivering, but also gives Cymorth Cymru a sense of where strengths and weaknesses might lie.

In this case, the new set of Housing First Wales [principles](#) was published before the self-reflection portion of the accreditation was completed. In the interests of progressing the development of Housing First across Wales, it was agreed that the new principles would be used for the updated score. As such, a direct comparison might be difficult, but both sets of scores give a kind of 'snapshot' of the team's views on its own fidelity at two different points in time.

ORIGINAL SELF-EVALUATION SCORING

This was undertaken as part of the accreditation process in 2020, using the original Housing First Wales principles. The total score was 26.

PRINCIPLE ONE

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

Conwy and Denbighshire score: 3

PRINCIPLE TWO

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.

Conwy and Denbighshire score: 3

PRINCIPLE THREE

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.

Conwy and Denbighshire score: 3

PRINCIPLE FOUR

The service is targeted at individuals who demonstrate a repeat pattern of disengagement with hostel accommodation and/or, individual/s 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.

Conwy and Denbighshire score: 3

PRINCIPLE FIVE

Individuals have choice and control.

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

Conwy and Denbighshire score: 2

PRINCIPLE SIX

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 RSLs.
- 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, provider, police, NHS, etc.

Conwy and Denbighshire score: 2

PRINCIPLE SEVEN

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 individuals, 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 individuals, 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 partners and ensuring that everyone involved in an individual'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.

Conwy and Denbighshire score: 2

PRINCIPLE EIGHT

An active engagement approach is used.

- 0 - Individuals 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 - Individuals are able to engage when they want, but there is limited outreach to encourage them and ensure the paths to engagement are open.
- 3 - Individuals 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 individual changes their mind and wants to engage, to ensure “window of opportunity” remains open.

Conwy and Denbighshire score: 3

PRINCIPLE NINE

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 individuals 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 individual, rather than with.
- 3 - There is a commitment to co-production and service user involvement, where the individual 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.

Conwy and Denbighshire score: 3

PRINCIPLE TEN

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.

Conwy and Denbighshire score: 2

UPDATED SCORING

This was undertaken as part of the reflective exercise, using the revised Housing First Wales principles. The total score was 27 - though a direct comparison with the original scoring is not possible due to the amendments made to the original principles since the project was first accredited.

PRINCIPLE ONE: THE RIGHT TO A GOOD QUALITY HOME

People have a right to a home that is affordable, secure, habitable, physically and culturally adequate, with access to services. People are prioritised for housing and helped to find a home as quickly as possible. Access to housing is not conditional, people have choice about where they live, and housing options are dispersed across communities.

- 0** - Housing is not affordable, secure, habitable and adequate. Accommodation options are restricted, people do not have choice about where they live, and/or multiple Housing First clients are congregated in a single building or group of buildings. People have to commit to treatment, engaging with support, or to changing their lifestyle, in order to access accommodation.
- 3** - Housing is affordable, suitable, secure, habitable and adequate. The right home is provided as quickly as is possible. Accommodation options are dispersed across the community, and located according to client choice. People can access accommodation regardless of circumstance and current or historical engagement with treatment or support.

Conwy and Denbighshire score: 3

PRINCIPLE TWO: FLEXIBLE SUPPORT FOR AS LONG AS IT IS NEEDED

Support is not time-limited, recognising that recovery takes time and varies depending on people's needs and experiences. Flexibility is crucial, as the frequency and intensity of support will fluctuate during people's support journey. The service commits to a small caseload, ensuring staff can provide intensive, person-centred support.

- 0** - Support is time-limited and finite. Support is inflexible and cannot be increased or decreased in line with the client's support needs. Support is commissioned on a rigid, per-hour basis. Caseloads are not controlled, and single members of staff might regularly work with an unsuitably large number of people, so large that the caseload affects the intensive person-centred support at the core of Housing First.
- 3** - Staff are committed to providing ongoing support not limited by time. Support can scale up and down, and can be re-accessed when needed. Support is not commissioned on a per-hour basis. Individual support worker caseloads are carefully considered to ensure that clients have the support they need, while staff wellbeing is maintained. No support worker should have a caseload too large for them to handle, and caseloads should be small enough to allow a persistent and proactive approach, focused on the needs of the person.

Conwy and Denbighshire score: 3

PRINCIPLE THREE: SEPARATION OF HOUSING MANAGEMENT & SUPPORT

Housing management and the provision of support are delivered independently of each other. Support workers are able to advocate on behalf of clients regarding any issues with their accommodation. Housing is not dependent on engagement with support and the offer of support continues if people move to a different home.

- 0 - Housing management and support have no separation. Housing management and support provision are carried out by the same organisation, and tenants perceive the two functions as being interchangeable.
- 1 - There is some separation between housing management and support provision. Support workers and housing management professionals might come from different teams within the same organisation. Clients perceive no or little difference in roles.
- 2 - Housing management and support provision are more clearly separated. Both might be delivered by the same organisation, but by separate directorates, with clear independence and autonomy from one another. Support workers act as advocates for clients and are not involved in rent collection. Clients perceive these roles as separate. If a tenancy ends, support will continue from the same organisation, even if the tenancy moves to a different landlord.
- 3 - Housing management and support are completely separate. They are carried out by different organisations, though both should be committed to Housing First as a model. Clients understand that the housing management function and support service operate independently from each other, feel confident that support workers will advocate for them, and know that any housing management issues will not affect the support they receive.

Conwy and Denbighshire score: 2

PRINCIPLE FOUR: PEOPLE HAVE CHOICE & CONTROL

People should have as much choice and control as is possible over where they live and the type of housing they live in. They should be in control of the support they receive, choosing where, when and how support is provided. People should be listened to and their choices should be respected.

- 0 - When it comes to accommodation, people are allocated one property without any choice and/or the tenure offered is a licence agreement. Clients have no input into the way their support is delivered, or what their support focuses on.
- 1 - People are able to choose properties, but within specific areas, or between properties of lower quality; the tenure offered is a full tenancy. Clients can make some basic decisions about their support.
- 2 - People are able to choose properties based on a free choice from the housing available; the tenure offered is an occupation contract. Clients are encouraged to make choices about, and take control of, their support.
- 3 - People are able to choose properties across all tenures, and can also request specific Private Rented Sector properties be considered or approached by the Housing First support provider; the tenure offered is an occupation contract. Clients are strongly empowered to make choices about, and take control of, their support.

Conwy and Denbighshire score: 3

PRINCIPLE FIVE: AN ACTIVE ENGAGEMENT APPROACH

An active engagement approach should be used throughout. This begins with assertive outreach, where staff should be proactive, persistent and purposeful as they build trusting relationships with people. This approach should continue when the person has a tenancy, with support being offered in different ways, even if engagement is low.

- 0** - Outreach is limited or doesn't exist, and the service relies on formalised referral systems. If clients or potential clients are slow to engage, or their level of enthusiasm for receiving support fluctuates, offers of support are withdrawn. The process must start again from scratch if the person ever changes their mind. Support workers show no flexibility when it comes to engaging with clients, arranging appointments or meetings in a prescribed way, regardless of the person's needs or preferences.
- 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. Outreach is often based on a set number of meetings. The service has a mentality of waiting for people to come and engage with the service, after initial contact has been made. While engaging with clients, support workers show some flexibility, but clients will still need to engage in somewhat prescribed ways.
- 3** - The service has a strong assertive outreach element, where people are approached regularly and engaged with, whatever their current circumstances, and without the proviso that they need to commit to support; the service is ready to move quickly if the person changes their mind and wants to engage. In the same way, engagement is flexible and responds to the needs of the client during their tenancy. Support workers will engage with clients in a range of situations and contexts, and will approach these situations in the most appropriate ways. The mentality is very much along the lines of 'leave nobody behind'.

Conwy and Denbighshire score: 3

PRINCIPLE SIX: A FOCUS ON STRENGTHS, GOALS & ASPIRATIONS

The service is supportive and empowering, helping people to develop increased self-esteem and confidence. Support staff work alongside people to identify their strengths, goals and aspirations in relation to their health, wellbeing, education, work, social or community activities. People are supported to pursue and achieve their chosen goals.

- 0** - Clients are not encouraged to identify or pursue strengths, goals or aspirations.
- 1** - Limited attention is given to a client's strengths, goals and/or aspirations, but in general these are not viewed as a priority and clients are not given the tools they need to achieve them.
- 2** - Clients are supported to identify their strengths, goals and aspirations. They are helped to make plans and to access opportunities, resources or support that will help them to achieve them. Small steps and successes are celebrated.
- 3** - Clients are supported to identify their strengths, goals and aspirations. They are helped to make plans and to access opportunities, resources or support that will help them to achieve them. Small steps and successes are celebrated. Clients are empowered and enabled to continue working towards their goals independently.

Conwy and Denbighshire score: 3

PRINCIPLE SEVEN: A HARM REDUCTION APPROACH

A harm reduction approach to substance and alcohol use is taken by stakeholders involved in delivering a Housing First service. People are not required to abstain from using substances in order to access a Housing First tenancy or support. People are supported holistically to reduce and minimise harm to their health and wellbeing.

- 0** - Using substances and/or alcohol is not accepted in the accommodation, and doing so would result in eviction, as is made clear in the relevant tenancy documentation. Staff have no understanding of substance or alcohol use, or the possible harms associated with them. Substance and alcohol use are not discussed with support workers.
- 1** - Substance and/or alcohol use in accommodation is banned in tenancy agreements. Support workers have a limited understanding of substance and alcohol use, but focus only on abstinence with clients
- 2** - The support provider takes a harm reduction approach, by openly discussing substance and/or alcohol use with clients if clients want this. Practical options to reduce harm (like needle exchange and provision of naloxone) are available or signposted to clients. Support staff are trained to understand substance and alcohol use, as well as the potential harms they can cause. Specialist partner organisations are integrated into the project work. Landlords at least tacitly accept that substance and/or alcohol use might be taking place.
- 3** - All partners and stakeholders understand the potential nature of Housing First clients, the associated trauma, and substance and alcohol use. Stakeholders have received training in and understand the potential harms associated with substance and alcohol use. Conversations around, and support with, harm reduction is provided to clients with no judgement and no mandates. All partners, including landlords, understand and support the approach, with specialist organisations integrated.

Conwy and Denbighshire score: 2

PRINCIPLE EIGHT: PROVIDED TO PEOPLE WHO NEED IT THE MOST

The service is targeted at people who have experienced repeat homelessness and have experience of trauma, mental health issues, substance and/or alcohol use issues, and/or engagement with the criminal justice system. This includes people who have often been failed by traditional approaches and systems.

- 0** - The service is able to exclude on the basis of complexity, and seeks to avoid clients deemed potentially 'risky'. Clients either do not have experience of the issues listed in the principle text, or clients are avoided by the service on the basis that they do.
- 3** - The service actively identifies and works with people who have co-occurring experiences of the issues listed in the principle. The service works with clients that more traditional models addressing homelessness might deem too risky.

Conwy and Denbighshire score: 3

PRINCIPLE NINE: PSYCHOLOGICALLY INFORMED & ACTIVELY INCLUSIVE

The service is psychologically-informed, taking into account the emotional and psychological needs of the person and their experience of trauma. It is actively inclusive of people from all backgrounds and identities, gender-informed and provides person-centred support based on people's needs, their context, and who they are.

- 0 -** There is no evidence of a psychologically-informed approach by the service or its partners. The service is not inclusive of people from all backgrounds and identities, and does not take into account the personal history or circumstances of the person while shaping the support.
- 1 -** There is limited evidence of a psychologically-informed approach by the service and its partners. The service is aware of the person's identity, personal history or circumstances, but this does not have a meaningful impact on how the service is delivered.
- 2 -** There is good evidence that a psychologically-informed approach is taken by the service provider. Partner organisations are aware of the impact of trauma and the need to be trauma-informed. The support provider is actively inclusive, staff have received equality and diversity training, and take into account a person's needs based on issues such as gender, race and sexual orientation when delivering support.
- 3 -** There is extensive evidence that a psychologically-informed approach is taken by the service provider and its partners. Staff at the service and all partner stakeholders are trained to understand and be aware of the personal history, trauma and experiences of their clients, and work to ensure their interactions are sensitive and responsive to those experiences. Staff engage in regular reflective practice and receive support to cope with vicarious trauma and traumatic incidents. The service is actively inclusive, staff have received equality and diversity training, and take into account a person's needs based on issues such as gender, race, disability and sexual orientation when delivering support. The service will continuously and pro-actively examine the relationship between the demographics of the local community, and the demographics of clients, and attempt to address barriers that are preventing particular groups of people from accessing support.

Conwy and Denbighshire score: 3

PRINCIPLE TEN: MULTI-AGENCY PARTNERSHIP WORKING

The widest range of services is involved in partnership from the service's inception, so people can access them in a timely manner if needed or wanted. These services might include, but are not limited to, mental health services, substance use services, wider health services, social services, housing partners, and probation.

- 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 plans to run with partial, incomplete 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 there are limited commitments, with no shared memorandum of understanding or service-level agreement. Alternatively, relationships with other local services have been developed over time, leading to strong partnership working, wherein people receive the support they need in a timely manner.
- 3** - The service is commissioned with full partnership approaches, and relationships between partners have strengthened over time; memoranda of understanding and/or service-level agreements are in place. There is regular commitment by all stakeholders to review the systems and continue to support individuals, and there are 'fast-track' referral procedures in place to improve access to services such as mental health.

Conwy and Denbighshire score: 2

PROGRESS SINCE ACCREDITATION AND FOLLOW-UP REPORT

The original recommendations, made in the [report](#) published upon the awarding of accreditation, are listed below. These recommendations were discussed and, in some cases, updated as part of follow-up work which took place roughly six months after the awarding of accreditation (detailed in a separate, shorter [report](#)). The outcomes of the reflective conversations which took place as part of this process are listed with each recommendation. The notes under each recommendation were written after extensive discussion with project staff.

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.

Some Housing First citizens end up living in temporary bed and breakfast accommodation (as is the case across Wales). This process is overseen by the local Homelessness Prevention Team, and the quality of any of this emergency or temporary accommodation can be challenged. The appropriate Officer will visit all accommodation of this type to carry out checks on the facilities and their condition, to ensure that the standard required by legislation is met. The team in Conwy Denbighshire maintain a list of all citizens in temporary accommodation, so they understand how many are currently in that type of housing, and how long they've been there.

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.

Developing links with the PRS, while still a theoretical goal of the service, remains difficult. The COVID-19 pandemic, and the passage of the Renting Homes (Wales) Act 2016 have led to increased risk aversion among landlords, who often have high demand for properties and can effectively dismiss people on benefits or bringing perceived risks. The landlord forums that took place some years ago have not resumed, but for its part the Housing First team has been pursuing the local authority team responsible for organising these. As soon as these meetings are re-established, the team is ready to present about Housing First, answer questions, and represent the model to PRS landlords.

Colleagues in the local authority's leasing team are working to encourage landlords who might be leaving the PRS to continue to let their properties, building buy-in. These colleagues engage with the Welsh Government [Leasing Scheme](#) too. The Housing First team has access to some of these properties if needed, though the risk aversion of PRS landlords is still a factor here.

Another concern is that because of high demand, rent prices in the PRS have skyrocketed, and would likely be too high for many Housing First clients. To avoid setting people up to fail, the right properties would need to be accessed, and these are few and far between.

The hope is that over time the PRS stabilises and Housing First clients can engage with it in a more substantive manner.

Instead, the main focus at present is on rebuilding relationships with Registered Social Landlords in the area. Engagement among RSLs, some of whom signed the Housing First Charter when it was published in 2019 has dropped. Some of the methods to build buy-in to the Housing First model discussed in other sections of this report are being used to encourage RSLs to work with the team in Conwy Denbighshire.

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.

For now, this recommendation is essentially on hold. Funding arrangements for the homelessness sector, and Housing First specifically, changed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. For now, the funding arrangement in place for the team in Conwy Denbighshire (the innovation grant) is working. Some discussions between the team and Welsh Government representatives have been had about transitioning from this grant to the Housing Support Grant (HSG). At this stage, timescales are unclear, and the change will not be imminent. More direction will follow at some point, but as the team understands it, a transition to the HSG regime would include a phase of ring-fenced funding, allowing time to develop a strategy for this transition.

4. Continue with presentations, looking for particularly problematic areas and addressing them.

As has already been discussed, the team is actively working on presentations to deliver at relevant forums. This also links with one of the team's goals, discussed later in this report – to build upon partnership working locally. Landlord forums will pick back up and presentations being developed to be shown at this and other contexts.

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.

The team in Conwy Denbighshire is always thinking about how best to maintain fidelity to the Housing First principles, and how to develop the service. This includes specific issues or themes, like maintaining separation between housing management and support. As the manager puts it, thinking like this is part of 'business as usual'. There are challenges, however. In particular, partners and other services need to develop this same sense of continual monitoring, and the Conwy Denbighshire team plays its part by emphasising the importance of doing so. Sometimes, the terminology used by other services and people can lead to confusion. Similarly, the job titles in use by the Housing First service might contribute to a sense of the team's work being inappropriately undervalued by others. This is a wider issue, but the job title aspect should be relatively easy to address. The current title is 'Housing First Officer', which is seen as unbalanced and potentially not adequately conveying what the role involves. The team will continue to work in this area, examine the options and choose an appropriate title, and build this into wider work around building an understanding of Housing First and the roles operating within it.

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.

This, again, aligns with the efforts of the team to develop and build buy-in across various stakeholder groups. Key themes of Housing First, like unlimited time for support, and the idea of person-centred work that focuses on a person's individual needs, are understood by team members, and will be communicated in a clear and effective way in the appropriate contexts.

7. Make representations to Welsh Government around longer-term funding for HF projects, or request reassurance from WG about longevity of funds.

Welsh Government has continued to openly emphasise its commitment to Housing First, with the expectation that every local authority will deliver the model. When appropriate, the service makes the case for the strength of the model, and the need for sufficient funding, to Welsh Government. As described above, discussions are ongoing nationally about transferring the original Welsh Government ‘trailblazer’ or ‘innovation’ funding for Housing First into the Housing Support Grant (HSG). While the HSG is regarded as a more stable funding source in the long-term, the loss of the dedicated funding for the Conwy Denbighshire HF project is a risk. It will be important for the Welsh Government to continue to emphasise their expectation for Housing First to be available in all local authorities, to ensure that these projects continue to be funded locally, whether this be through the HSG or the Revenue Support Grant.

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.

No specific ‘choice log’ document has been developed, but the choices made by clients in Denbighshire, particularly around properties and preferred areas, and as part of various application processes, are recorded and available to the team. The idea is to expand this to include clients in Conwy too. This information can be used to develop networks with appropriate partner organisations, so it is valuable.

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

The Housing First team in Conwy Denbighshire participates in meetings alongside police officers of various ranks, and regular communications with local police representatives also take place outside the meetings. As such, working relationships are developing and improving. The Adults at Risk meeting involves representatives of the police, including the local community partnerships officer. There are opportunities for any Housing First team member to attend and, if necessary, raise any concerns about a client in the community.

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.

While the service has traditionally worked with more male clients than female clients (which is the case in Housing First across Wales), the team has supported more females in recent years than previously. Many of the female clients referred to the team have experienced Adverse Childhood Events and domestic violence or abuse. Citizens can choose the gender of their support worker. Members of the team have found that, for the most part, female clients prefer female support workers, and males prefer male support workers.

The Housing First team has also developed a close working relationship with the DASU (Domestic Abuse Service Unit) and collaborates with them frequently when it comes to specific citizens. One member of staff at the DASU used to work in the Housing First team, which means that there is already an understanding of what Housing First is within the DASU team. A new scheme has recently developed by the probation service, operating out of a local women’s centre, that the team has also already identified as an opportunity for working together. The scheme involves activities being offered to women, including self-development group workshops. The Housing First team encourages female clients to engage with this, but has encountered some reluctance so far.

The team has also recently experienced delivering Housing First support to both members of a couple. This has presented a steep learning curve, but also the opportunity to learn. Team members were ‘treading carefully’ and paying attention to the specialist advice they received.

11. More training into aspects of PIE should be offered to members of staff.

The original accreditation process identified psychologically-informed environments (PIE) as an area that could do with some focus. Additionally, the specific theme of reflection, and improving how this is carried out on an ongoing basis by members of the team, was highlighted as also meriting some attention. According to the team, this remains the case: existing members of staff would benefit from refreshing their understanding of psychologically-informed environments, and new members of staff will need a coherent and substantive introduction to the topic.

Progress has been made; some members of the team have attended PIE training in recent months, for example. Efforts are ongoing to source training for the whole team, to refresh the approach to PIE, and reinforce existing knowledge and practice.

Additionally, a handbook for new staff is in development. The focus is not specifically on PIE, but PIE will form a detailed section of the handbook, which will also take into account learning that has been identified as useful by more experienced members of the team. As is often the case with resources like this, the handbook will serve as a useful refresher for team members, as well as fulfilling its more overt purpose of informing new members of staff.

As was originally discussed during the accreditation process, the induction module will also likely need a review to ensure it is still fit for purpose, and captures the key things that new members of staff will need to learn as they begin working with the team. Progress on the handbook, and the nature of what is included there, might well have an impact on development of the induction module.

Details about reflection, and good practice surrounding this crucial activity (which can take a variety of forms), will be included in materials like the new handbook and the induction module. In terms of the reflection opportunities available to staff members, there have been a few developments over recent months. An external party was, until recently, commissioned to provide regular, scheduled clinical supervision appointments. However, senior staff within the team noticed that colleagues were not getting the value they should have been from this system, which was too rigid and prescriptive. Attendance was dropping. Various options were discussed, and it was decided that a more flexible approach would be taken, whereby staff could request a clinical supervision session when required, and have it booked on this more 'ad hoc' basis, instead of the bulk or block booking approach taken previously. Staff are now attending reflective sessions when they feel they need to, and finding the process more valuable to their practice.

A counsellor is also based within the wider homelessness team, and members of the Housing First team have made use of the therapeutic support this person offers. What is more, varying sub-groups of staff at the local authority are offered opportunities to reflect with colleagues working at the same level, even if they're in a different team – these opportunities have, again, been taken by participants from the Housing First team, and feedback suggests they have been very useful.

Members of the Housing First team are also encouraged to develop their own reflective strategies (which they can discuss during supervision sessions with their manager or team leader), and team meeting also allow for group reflection. Senior staff have observed that different members of staff engage differently with these different modes of reflection, which is to be expected – the key aspect of reflection is that varied opportunities are available, and employees are encouraged and empowered to take those that appeal most.

12. Find ways to develop buy-in with mental health, potentially through a secondment.

The idea that the provision of mental health support for clients could be better integrated into the Housing First team still makes sense, according to the team. Internal mental health services within the local authority are currently being reviewed, and a new manager is in post. This review includes an examination of the relationship between these mental health services and the local health board, and the hope is that this relationship will develop and strengthen over time.

As such, rather than focusing on building mental health provision into the Housing First team, the priority will likely be engaging with this review process, to ensure that the Housing First team has been properly represented to the mental health services within the local authority, and that this mental health team has a proper understanding of what their colleagues do, what Housing First is, and how important mental health support is as part of the model. It is also important that the roles of different members of staff are made clear, and that the primary needs of people receiving support are acted upon properly, with person-centred support being a key element of Housing First as an approach. All of this work should reinforce the relationship between the two teams over the coming months, which can only benefit clients receiving mental health support as part of their participation in Housing First.

13. Continue with changes to the board, making it less of an update receiving group and making it more hands-on.

As the original accreditation process came to an end, changes to the panel-oriented system by which clients were discussed and accepted into the service were already planned.

Since then, the transition has taken place: instead of panel meetings that discuss a larger number of clients, the service is working to maintain its flexibility and responsiveness by having smaller meetings that take place as each referral needs discussion. This also alleviates wait times to enter the Housing First service, and avoids the need for specific intake 'windows'; the idea is that the right people from various organisations are brought together at the right time to discuss specific cases. This is an interesting example of the service learning about what will be most flexible and effective when it comes to getting people support as quickly as is possible, and implementing a new approach. The panel approach made sense initially, due to a larger influx of potential clients to what was then a new service. Now, the service is established, so people are referred in smaller groups or individually. Additionally, some people might receive support from the service and then, for various reasons, lose contact. Given that members of the Housing First team are likely to recognise at least some of these names, meeting in a more ad hoc way makes sense.

Part of this transition involved the referral process and the eligibility for Housing First support were briefly reviewed, but a more concerted examination of the intake process is ongoing. Work has already been done to strengthen and clarify parts of the referral documentation, to help stakeholders build a solid understanding of Housing First.

CASE STUDY

The team in Conwy Denbighshire has provided a case study, outlining specific support that team member Hollie has provided to client Josie (not her real name). The case study below has been anonymised to prevent personal details being identifiable. Josie's background and main elements of how support has been offered to this person, are summarised here, with additional commentary to highlight specific aspects of Housing First that might be notable to others.

JOSIE'S BACKGROUND

Josie originally lived in a city in the Midlands, and fled a volatile relationship with her ex-husband, which involved her suffering domestic violence. Josie was offered refuge in North Wales, and after leaving this refuge, entered the Welsh homelessness system. Originally provided temporary accommodation by the Denbighshire County Council Homelessness Team, but in need of more intensive support, Josie was referred to the Housing First service, where she met Hollie, her support officer.

Cymorth comments: This section of the case study highlights what has been discussed elsewhere, in particular during various accreditation processes: temporary accommodation, accepted as a kind of 'necessary evil' as part of the Housing First process due to the challenge of finding permanent housing, poses its own issues. It cannot be seen as a place to live long term, as is proven by service users who do not see it as such. The use of temporary accommodation seems to be having a specific negative effect in this case, and there is no reason to think this is an isolated issue.

The fact that this female citizen has experienced domestic violence in the past is notable. This is, by all accounts, an all-too-common experience for women experiencing homelessness. It is also worth noting that recent statistics suggest more women are entering Housing First support. This is positive, and is in part what we hoped to achieve by carrying out the recent [principle review](#). However, it increases the importance of an understanding of traumas specific to women, gender-informed support, and links with specialist organisations.

CURRENT SITUATION

Josie has found the experience of being moved into temporary accommodation difficult, and has been struggling to settle. She has also been in a relationship, which caused some issues both with her accommodation and in the community. At first, Josie was reluctant to open up to Hollie, but the relationship has now improved to the extent that Josie seems to feel like she can talk to her support officer. In fact, Josie will now approach Hollie for advice about and support with a range of different issues. According to Josie, the approach taken by Hollie and the Housing First service is different to other services because she feels listened to and understood, and the support provided is flexible. On some days, Josie will make clear that she does not want to talk to Hollie, while at other times, Josie will take advantage of the fact that her support officer is only a phone call or text message away – an aspect of the support that Josie likes. Hollie speaks to Josie on most days throughout the week, and Josie engages well, making the most of the support on offer. She is at an early stage of her Housing First journey, but in the short time that has already passed, Josie and Hollie have made great progress in developing a positive and productive working relationship.

Cymorth comments: This section highlights the power of flexibility, and of support workers not fearing 'non-engagement' too much, but rather focusing on being there for a client when the client is ready; this has come up across the lifespan of the accreditation in various ways. The fact that the support worker is ready to speak to Josie when Josie is ready, means they end up speaking a lot.

The other idea evidenced here is the importance of taking into account the community around a person, including potential partners, when considering someone's situation and how to work with them.

POSITIVE HOUSING FIRST ASPECTS

Over recent months, Josie's presentation has improved, and she appears to feel much better within herself. She has been taking more pride in her appearance, telling Hollie that she takes time out of her week to 'pamper herself'. Josie has also explained that she would like to start volunteering in local charity shops and centres that offer group activities. There is still some work to be done around Josie's mental health, and to build her confidence in the community, to better help her feel a part of it.

When Josie first started receiving Housing First support, she spent a lot of time sitting in the bedroom in her temporary accommodation, and begging outside shops in the town centre. The amount of begging has decreased, and Josie has started to attend group activities. Josie continues to engage well, and speaks to the Housing First team regularly about her future, discussing this in a positive way.

Cymorth comments: The comments made here about Josie's appearance and her pride in it highlight one of the varied ways in which a support worker can 'intuit' a client's progress and situation. It is also heartening to note the client's shift from shorter-term thinking, often a feature of addiction issues, into longer-term thinking about the future, as Josie focuses on goals that are further off.

BARRIERS TO HOUSING FIRST DELIVERY

When Josie is under the influence of substances or alcohol, it can be difficult to engage with her. The same applies to situations when Josie is with associates that do not think or feel the same way she does. Hollie has noticed a difference in Josie's level of engagement when she is with others. When Josie is on her own, she is motivated to achieve certain tasks and confides in Hollie about her feelings and emotions.

The lack of suitable housing, as is often the case, is a significant barrier to progressing with a tenancy and support. At times, Josie has found the temporary accommodation she has been supported to move into difficult. She is also vulnerable to influence by others while living where she does, and she is also particularly vulnerable when she is in a relationship; Josie is often exploited by her partners, which has caused issues with the accommodation. Having stable and permanent housing where Josie can feel safe and take pride in her home will be a hugely positive step when it happens.

Cymorth comments: It is a relatively normal phenomenon, in many areas of life, for a person to act differently in front of their friends than when they are alone with someone trying to help them. As Josie has discovered, a decent active and responsive engagement approach that takes this into account should ensure that Josie can still engage with the support available to her.

Property scarcity as a significant barrier to Housing First is evidenced here too, as Housing First depends on movement into permanent accommodation that is as quick as possible, and we've already seen that temporary accommodation is not the ideal home for Josie (or, indeed, anybody).

In terms of work with Josie's partners, it might be that working with a specialist agency can bolster gender-informed approaches to Josie's support.

NEXT STEPS

Recently, Josie has been referred to various agencies – substance use services, for example, as well as the community mental health team. She has also been registered at a GP surgery. Josie has made recent disclosures about struggling with her mental health, so the focus now is on getting her involved with the relevant support providers who can help her with this.

Josie has started to participate in various group activities at the local Salvation Army, and wants to volunteer at charity shops – this, she feels, would bolster her confidence. The longer-term goal is to eventually be employed and earn her own money. In the future, the team hopes to see Josie in her own accommodation, which would be somewhere safe and stable to call home. From here, Josie could engage with services, and continue to make the positive changes she has started to, which is particularly impressive after some difficult life experiences and trauma.

Cymorth comments: This section highlights the importance of a range of partner organisations in delivering the Housing First model. The relationship between a GP and Housing First clients (as well as, potentially, the service more generally) has come up a lot during Network and accreditation discussions and is clearly valuable.

There is, again, the discussion of Josie's increasing focus on longer-term goals, which demonstrates the extent to which they are enabled by fidelity to the principles. This also demonstrates the concept at the core of Housing First – that people who have experienced a range of traumas can benefit from the model, and improve their lives, with a view to independent tenancy maintenance in the future.

THIS CASE STUDY AND THE PRINCIPLES

When it comes to Josie's support, choice and control is a particularly important aspect of the principles. Hollie always reminds Josie that she has the right to make her own choices about how she engages with services, and that she will always be supported by Hollie and the Housing First team, wherever possible, with the choices that she makes. Josie has discussed that, over recent weeks, she has felt that the decisions she has made have been poor, and that she regrets making them. For example, Josie's benefit payment was made at midnight, and by 9am, all of the money had been spent on drugs and alcohol. Josie regretted this almost instantly, and acknowledged she will not have any money for three weeks, until the next payment date. Hollie has discussed this with Josie, looking for ways that support can be provided here, to avoid this situation arising again. Hollie and Josie have made engagements to go shopping for food and essentials the day she is paid next, so at least groceries have been covered, in the event that Josie spends the rest of her money quickly again.

Cymorth comments: Fidelity to the Housing First model involves delivery of all the principles, which have large areas of overlap. However, working with different people, and providing the person-centred support that is so vital to the model, will naturally lead to reflection about some principles or concepts more than others.

It is interesting, then, that Josie's support worker has specifically highlighted the ideas of choice and control as being particularly relevant to Josie's case. Ideas about negative or poor decision-making are evident here, whereby Josie has reflected on her own choices and decided to make 'better' ones next time, as she perceives it. It is clear that Josie's support worker wants to empower Josie to make choices for herself, but will work with Josie to discuss how to make different choices, essentially enabling Josie to learn from experience. The planning that has been undertaken in a collaborative way by Josie and her support worker is a great example of person-centred support, wherein somebody who has developed a relationship with a client and thus understands their behaviour, works with the person receiving support to develop a plan that is right for them.

FUTURE AIMS

The team in Conwy Denbighshire has identified two specific aims to focus on over the period until the next part of the accreditation process.

1. Increase property offers for Housing First citizens through RSLs as a priority, and via the PRS when feasible and appropriate
2. Continue to establish and build relationships with other partner agencies to educate them about, and build buy-in to, Housing First. Ensure that this is a two-way conversation, and that the Housing First team learns from other agencies, to enhance relationships, partnership working and access to services for Housing First citizens.

LESSONS LEARNED

The team in Conwy Denbighshire have developed a 'lessons learned' document, ongoing since the inception of the service. The plan is to continue updating this, capturing key learning and how best to utilise it as time goes on. This will ensure that as new circumstances arise, the project can adapt, remaining flexible by actively focusing on learning opportunities. This attitude is keeping with the spirit of the accreditation process.

In terms of a more specific lesson learned, the importance of a well-structured and effectively monitored lone working policy has been identified. All members of the team need to understand and use the policy. The team acknowledges the possibility that people working in Housing First might, subconsciously or not, perceive themselves as 'immune' to risks, given the levels of need they see in clients every day, when supporting these citizens in the community. This hasn't become a huge issue for the service yet, but to pre-empt and counteract this risk, the lone working policy will be updated, and Housing First Officers reminded of how they need to consider their safety regular and take appropriate action to bolster it.

NEXT STEPS

The next stage of the accreditation, as signed off by the Housing First Network Wales, takes place roughly five years after the initial awarding. As such, the aim is to begin this part of the process towards the end of 2025, or early in 2026. Some details still need clarification, but the next stage of the process will involve more substantive re-accreditation work than the reflective exercise carried out here, without being a complete retread of the original piece of work, and with the acknowledgement that a set of recommendations focusing on areas for improvement already exists.

Until then, contact will be maintained between Cymorth Cymru's Housing First Manager and Housing First Policy Officer and the Housing First team in Conwy and Denbighshire, so that issues can be discussed, and progress on recommendations and other areas of practice can be talked through in an informal way. The same goes for the aims that the service has identified, which will be a key additional area of focus for the next stage of the accreditation