



## BRIEFING PAPER

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# Housing First: tackling homelessness for those with complex needs (UK)

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1. What is Housing First (HF)?
2. HF in England
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## Summary

Housing First (HF) is a homelessness intervention strategy, aimed at people with multiple and complex needs, particularly rough sleepers. It provides access to permanent housing as a starting point to help tackle their non-housing needs as well.

HF is often contrasted with “linear”, “stairway” and “treatment first” schemes, which proponents argue can result in high rates of attrition and a lack of appropriate service support due to the need for users to meet certain requirements before moving into stable independent housing.

[Research commissioned by the Housing First Europe Hub](#) (2019) suggested “strong evidence” of HF offering “an effective solution to homelessness among people with high and complex needs”. This prompted a growing interest in HF. The [Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development reported](#) that, as at June 2020, thirteen nations had national HF programmes.

In the UK, housing is a devolved issue and the four UK Governments have each piloted and evaluated HF approaches. This briefing describes policy across the UK, evaluations of its effectiveness, and academic and third-sector reports on the utility of HF.

### England

[Autumn Budget 2017](#) committed £28 million to support three Government-sponsored pilots in the West Midlands, Liverpool City Region and Greater Manchester. Support for HF pilots was confirmed in the [Conservative’s 2019 Election Manifesto](#).

The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) published an [interim evaluation](#) of the three pilots in 2020. The evaluation found “some positive stories” regarding service user outcomes but challenges were experienced in acquiring properties and recruiting skilled staff. It recommended the Ministry seek routes for sustainability and introduce a longer lead time for confirmation of funding. The [Ministry said](#) the report would “inform next steps”.

Future editions of the [MHCLG evaluation](#) will include a quantitative evaluation of the programme and a cost benefit analysis for England.

In response to the Coronavirus pandemic the Government launched the ‘Everyone In’ initiative through which local authorities were charged with getting all rough sleepers into self-contained accommodation. Bodies assisting rough sleepers have drawn parallels with aspects of the Housing First model. [The Local Government Association \(LGA\) commented](#) “The success of Everyone In demonstrates that, given the mandate and funding, councils, working with their partners, have the means to end the vast majority of rough sleeping.”

### Scotland

In [Ending homelessness together](#) (2018) the Scottish Government and Convention of Scottish Local Authorities confirmed they would “ensure a national shift towards rapid rehousing by default, including Housing First”. From 2018 to 2022, the [Scottish Government](#), together with Social Bite and Merchant’s House, intends to secure up to [830 HF placements](#). Homelessness Network Scotland also published a draft [HF development framework](#) for consultation in November 2020.

### Wales

In [February 2018](#), the Welsh Government said it had funded ten HF pilot projects, including in Bridgend, Blaenau Gwent, Merthyr Tydfil, Cardiff, Conwy and Swansea. Support for HF

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was re-confirmed in the Welsh Government's 2019 [Homelessness strategy](#). The [Homelessness Action Group](#), established by the Welsh Government, has [recommended](#) that HF be adopted as part of the default approach taken to support people who are at risk of homelessness or rough sleeping—the Welsh Government [accepted](#) this in principle in 2019.

### **Northern Ireland (NI)**

The Northern Ireland Housing Executive's [Homelessness Strategy for Northern Ireland 2017-22](#) intends to build on the "HF NI pathway model". A HF mode was piloted by the [charity Depaul](#) in Belfast in 2014, with support from the Northern Ireland Housing Executive; an [evaluation](#) followed in 2016.

In June 2020, the [charity argued](#) that the "rollout of the HF model should be costed, funded and implemented throughout Northern Ireland" as part of the Coronavirus exit strategy.

### **Debates and evaluations of HF**

Currently, most of the evidence on HF is international and it is uncertain how far projects trialled elsewhere are applicable to the UK. This is due to the differing nature of housing support systems and the varying nature of HF schemes applied.

Section 6 of this briefing summarises and signposts material on HF. This includes discussion of its use in Finland, which is often cited as an example of HF's effectiveness, the impact of HF schemes on housing retention, health, crime and antisocial behaviour and substance misuse, its cost effectiveness, and sources of further research.

### **Other homelessness strategies in the UK**

Proponents of HF stress that it is only one of several strategies required to tackle homelessness. The Commons Library has published the following related briefings:

- [Tackling the under-supply of housing in England](#) (CBP-7671)
- [Statutory Homelessness in England](#) (CBP-1164)
- [Households in temporary accommodation \(England\)](#) (CBP-2110)
- [Rough sleepers: access to services and support \(England\)](#) (CBP-7698)
- [Rough sleeping \(England\)](#) (CBP-2007)

# 1. What is Housing First (HF)?

HF was an approach first developed in North America in the last quarter of the twentieth century, with the term being coined in 1988.<sup>1</sup> The HF model as recognised today is usually traced back to the [Pathways Housing First](#) organisation, founded in New York in 1992.

HF is an intervention that supports homeless people with multiple and complex needs by providing them with permanent independent housing and flexible, wrap-around support services. It is related to, and overlaps with, other housing-led models, and is frequently contrasted with a “staircase” model of support. It is not the only effective strategy— early intervention, personalised services and preventive support are also cited as important parts of strategies to reduce and prevent homelessness.<sup>2</sup>

“Staircase” services tend to be characterised as treatment-led, requiring users to resolve non-housing needs *before* being able to progress towards independent housing, resulting in higher rates of attrition and sustaining chronic homelessness.<sup>3</sup>

A variety of HF approaches have attracted growing international interest. In June 2020, the [Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development](#) (OECD) said that thirteen countries have a national HF policy, including Canada, Finland, Ireland and the United States. A further six nations, including the UK, have local or regional HF schemes.<sup>4</sup>

Section 6 of this briefing signposts research on the effectiveness of HF and how it compares to other housing and prevention strategies.

## 1.1 Background: duties to provide accommodation in the UK

Across the UK, nations have legislated to introduce a legal duty to secure accommodation for certain homeless applicants.

In summary:

- **English** local authorities have a full rehousing duty if an individual is eligible on basis of immigration status, homeless or threatened with homelessness, in priority need, and unintentionally homeless.<sup>5</sup> There are also duties to prevent/relieve homelessness for a period irrespective of priority need.
- **Scottish** local authorities are required to find permanent accommodation for all applicants who are unintentionally homeless;<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> J. Waegemakers Schiff and J. Rook, [Housing First: Where is the evidence?](#), 2012, p5

<sup>2</sup> Public Health England, [Evidence review: Adults with complex needs \(with a particular focus on street begging and street sleeping\)](#), 2018, ch.9

<sup>3</sup> N. Pleace and J. Bretherton, [What do we mean by HF?](#), ENHR Conference Paper, 2012

<sup>4</sup> OECD, [HC3.2 National strategies for combatting homelessness](#), 23 June 2020 from OECD, [Housing conditions](#), accessed 16 February 2021

<sup>5</sup> Part VII of the [Housing Act 1996](#), as amended; Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG), [Homelessness code of guidance for local authorities](#), para 15

<sup>6</sup> Part II of the [Housing \(Scotland\) Act 1987](#), as amended

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- **Welsh** local authorities have a duty to work to prevent/relieve homelessness for those who are threatened with homelessness or homeless within a 56 day period. Thereafter, authorities have a duty to secure accommodation for households deemed to be unintentionally homeless and in priority need.<sup>7</sup>
- The **Northern Ireland** Executive has a duty to secure accommodation if the applicant passes [four homelessness tests](#).<sup>8</sup>

### 1.2 Core aims of HF & targeted groups

Housing First Europe have laid out [eight core principles of HF](#) in an European context. The UK Government's HF pilots (see section 2.3) are based on seven key principles, adopted from [Housing First England's principles](#) for an English HF scheme:

- 1 People have a right to a home;
- 2 Flexible support is provided for as long as it is needed;
- 3 Housing and support are separated;
- 4 Individuals have choice and control;
- 5 An active engagement approach is used;
- 6 The service is based on people's strengths, goals and aspirations; and
- 7 A harm reduction approach is used.<sup>9</sup>

Further detail on the principles is provided in Homeless Link's [HF in England: The Principles](#) (undated).

**HF schemes are not targeted at all homeless people, they focus on those with the highest and most complex needs.** Neither is it intended to be the sole form of support provided.<sup>10</sup>

The three current HF pilots organised by the MHCLG in England vary in their eligibility requirements, but typically target those with "a combination of: mental and/or physical health issues; repeated substance use; a history of offending; and/or serial exclusion from other homelessness services."<sup>11</sup>

### 1.3 How does HF compare to other models?

As previously noted, HF is often contrasted with the traditional "stairway" model of homelessness schemes, where individuals are "readied" for living independently. This often involves tackling non-housing issues (e.g. alcohol, substance misuse and antisocial behaviour) that may put housing stability at risk *before* allowing individuals to

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<sup>7</sup> Chapter 2 and Schedule 2 of the [Housing \(Wales\) Act 2014](#)

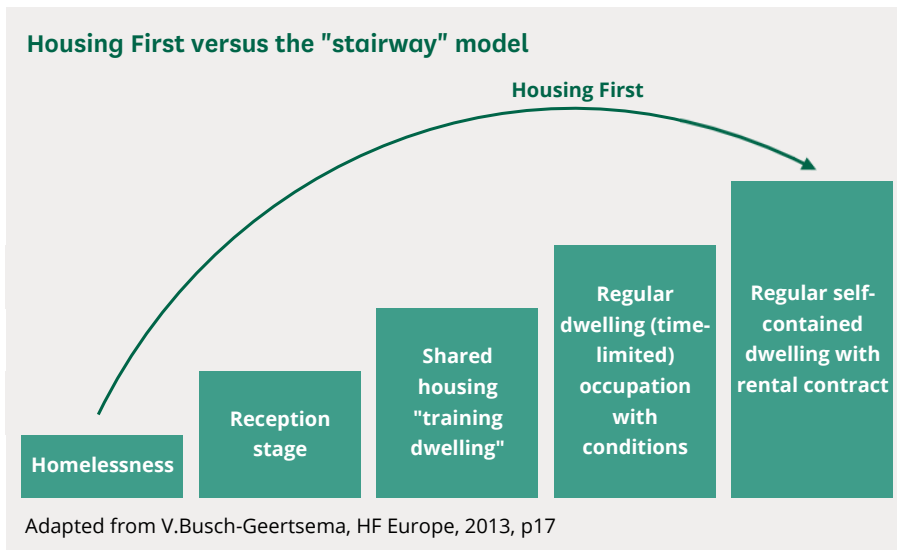
<sup>8</sup> Part II of [The Housing \(Northern Ireland\) Order 1988](#); Housing Rights NI, [The four homelessness "tests"](#), accessed 17 February 2021

<sup>9</sup> MHCLG, [Evaluation of the HF pilots: Interim process evaluation report](#), December 2020, ppiv-v.

<sup>10</sup> N. Pleace, [Using HF in integrated homelessness strategies: A review of the evidence](#) 2018, pp24-5, 37

<sup>11</sup> MHCLG, [Evaluation of the HF pilots: Interim process evaluation report](#), December 2020, px, para 3.5 and Annex II

move towards independent living.<sup>12</sup> HF strategies circumvent transitional forms of accommodation (e.g. hostels), as shown in the illustration below:



HF is sometimes included under the umbrella of "housing-led" services. Many existing services, often called "tenancy sustainment services" in the UK, provide floating support to previously homeless individuals in a similar vein to HF programmes.<sup>13</sup> Distinct features of HF include a set of core principles providing permanent housing and support and targeting those with multiple and the most acute needs.<sup>14</sup>

Housing First Europe's [Final report](#) (2013) argued the stability provided by the provision of accommodation without preconditions made non-housing interventions more effective:

The alternative concept seeks to move homeless people into permanent housing as quickly as possible, arguing that housing is a fundamental right for all, and should not have to be "earned" by solving individual problems, change of behaviour etc. [...]

Support is provided to those homeless persons who need it, but sobriety and/or motivation to change are not requirements for getting access to permanent and self-contained housing, nor can a failure to comply with support services lead to an eviction. Compliance with normal residential tenancy laws is the only requirement. An essential premise within this approach is that social service interventions can be more effective when provided to people in their own home.<sup>15</sup>

The [report](#) described HF as building on existing approaches, but argued that offering housing "first" represents significant differentiation:

[...] Stakeholders in the UK and in Germany, for example, often claim that the Housing First approach does not imply as great a paradigm shift as in the US and that they are "doing it already".

<sup>12</sup> HF Europe Hub, [1.2 The history of HF](#), accessed 19 February 2021

<sup>13</sup> N. Pleace, [Using Housing First in Integrated Homelessness Strategies: A Review of the Evidence](#), 2018, pp31-8

<sup>14</sup> Crisis, [Everybody In: How to end homelessness in Great Britain](#), 2018, p219; Housing First England, [HF in England: FAQs](#), accessed 23 February 2021; Homeless Link, [HF or housing-led?](#), 2015, pp3, 7

<sup>15</sup> V. Busch-Geertsema et al, [Housing First Europe: Final report](#), 2013, p17

But the usual support may often be of a considerably lower intensity, time limited and based on certain conditions, and does not necessarily imply the same effectiveness as methods such as Assertive Community Treatment or Intensive Case Management. [...]

However the Housing First approach is innovative as it opposes the notion that homeless people require any “preparation” outside the regular housing market and it favours quick allocation of permanent housing with on-going support even to people with the most serious and complex problems such as mental illness and co-occurring substance abuse.<sup>16</sup>

Criticisms of the “stairway” model include users becoming “stuck” at one level, attrition between the stages, and setting requirements that are unattainable or harder to meet without access to housing and support services.<sup>17</sup>

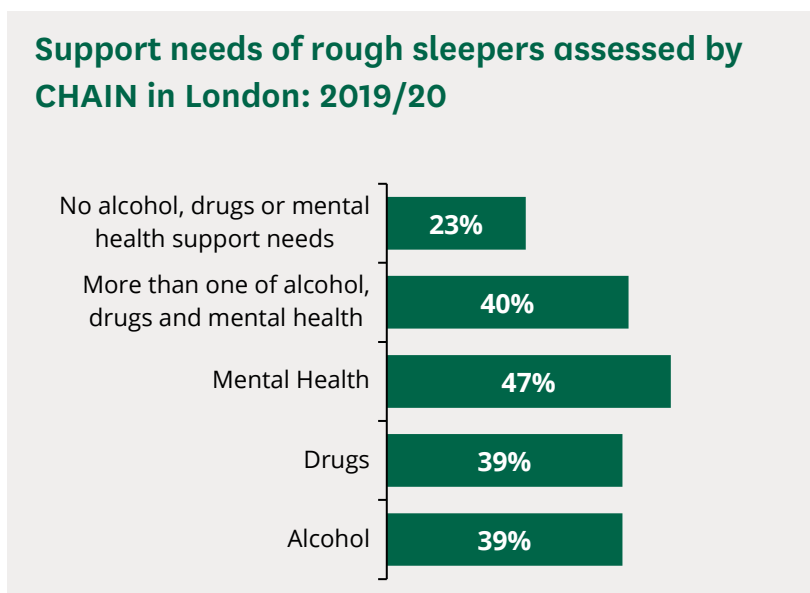
## 1.4 What support needs do rough sleepers have?

HF programmes are designed to support those with high levels of complex needs—not all homeless people fall into this group.

The [Combined Homelessness and Information Network](#) (CHAIN) database contains information about rough sleepers in London who have been contacted by outreach teams or who have accessed accommodation for rough sleepers in the capital. CHAIN is managed by the charity [St Mungo’s](#).

The chart shows the complex needs of rough sleepers in London in 2018/19, for whom a support needs assessment was completed.

The Library’s [Statutory homelessness in England](#) provides further statistics on statutory homelessness.



Note: Excludes people for whom none of the three support needs were known or assessed. The majority of those excluded (87%) were people who slept rough once or twice.

Source: [CHAIN annual report, Greater London 2019/20](#), section 4.8

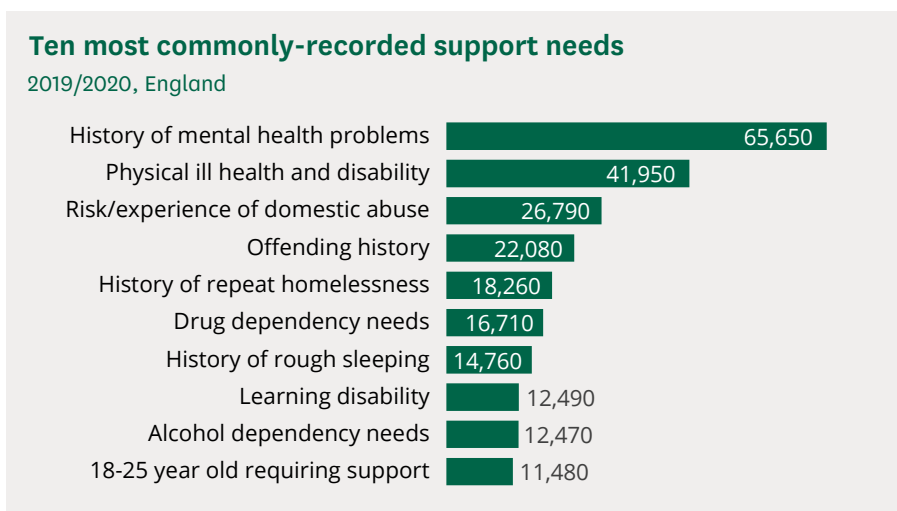
<sup>16</sup> [Ibid](#), p17

<sup>17</sup> D. Padgett et al, [Ending homelessness, transforming systems, and changing lives](#), 2016, introduction; Crisis, [Staircases, elevators and cycles of change](#), 2010



[Research](#) has suggested a “strong overlap between experiences of more extreme forms of homelessness and other support needs”.<sup>18</sup> A review of HF by the [Centre for Housing Policy](#), commissioned by St Mungo’s in 2018, concluded “there is a small, high need, high cost, group of homeless people whose needs are not being fully met by existing services”.<sup>19</sup>

MHCLG also publishes data on the support needs of households who are owed a prevention or relief duty under housing legislation. The *Housing Reduction Act 2017* provides that households owed a prevention or relief duty are entitled to a personalised housing plan. The local authority must assess the support needs of households as part of that process. In 2019/20, 134,410 households were identified as having support needs – 47% of those assessed as owed a prevention or relief duty. There was an average of 2.1 support needs per household.



Notes: Figures are rounded to the nearest ten. Data was imputed for 20 local authorities. Categories should not be added together as this risks double-counting households with multiple support needs.

Source: MHCLG, [Detailed local authority tables: 2019/20](#), Table A3, 29 Oct 2020

Organisations such as [Crisis](#) and the [Centre for Social Justice](#) have stressed that not all rough sleepers have complex needs. In 2017, Crisis estimated that around a third of single homelessness people in the UK had low or no support needs (c. 40,000-140,000 people). Both organisations argued that greater availability of affordable housing, cheaper rents and reducing restrictions on Housing Benefit would be of greater benefit to those with low or no support needs.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Joseph Rowntree Foundation, [Tackling homelessness and exclusion: Understanding complex lives](#), 2011, p1

<sup>19</sup> Centre for Housing Policy/University of York, [Using Housing First in Integrated Homelessness Strategies: A Review of the Evidence](#), 2018, p2

<sup>20</sup> Crisis, [Moving on: Improving access to housing for single homeless people in England](#), 2017, p10; Centre for Social Justice, [HF: Housing-led solutions to rough sleeping and homelessness](#), 2017, p16

## 1.5 How many rough sleepers might be targeted?

The Crisis report, [Implementing Housing First across England, Scotland and Wales](#) (August 2018) provided an estimate of the numbers who could be targeted in Great Britain.

Reflecting research that argues HF is most effective when targeting people with high and complex needs, and a number of assumptions (including the number of homeless and the proportion with complex needs), Crisis estimated demand in an initial cohort of between 18,400 and 32,250 people.<sup>21</sup> The lower figure is based on an estimated homelessness population of 120,000 in 2010.<sup>22</sup>

Scoping research by [Homeless Link](#) in 2015 for England estimated that “Housing First would be targeted at between 10–20% of people currently in contact with homelessness services”.<sup>23</sup> A figure of 20% constituted a cohort of 8,000 people in England.

The [Centre for Social Justice](#) in 2017 recommended that, in addition to the estimated 8,000 identified by Homeless Link, recurrent rough sleepers who have multiple support needs should also qualify for HF—they estimated around “10,826 rough sleepers outside of London have high support needs and would benefit from Housing First”. Overall, the Centre said the UK Government should design a programme aimed at between 20,800 and 46,000 people.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Crisis, [Implementing HF across England, Scotland and Wales](#), 2018, section 3.2

<sup>22</sup> [Ibid](#), Appendix 1

<sup>23</sup> Homeless Link, [“HF” or “Housing led”? The current picture of HF in England](#), 2015, p3

<sup>24</sup> Centre for Social Justice, [HF: Housing-led solutions to rough sleeping and homelessness](#), 2017, pp47-8

## 2. HF in England

### 2.1 HF and ending rough sleeping

In the November 2017 Budget, the UK Government committed to halve rough sleeping by 2022 and eliminate it by 2027 using programmes such as HF. The then-Communities Secretary, Sajid Javid, said:

No one should ever have to sleep rough. That's why this government is committed to halving rough sleeping by 2022 and eliminating it altogether by 2027.

[...] The Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Implementation Taskforce and the Rough Sleeping Advisory Panel, together with the 3 Housing First pilots, are important steps in making that happen.<sup>25</sup>

The [Conservative Party Manifesto 2019](#) contained a commitment to “end the blight of rough sleeping by the end of the next Parliament [2024] by expanding successful pilots and programmes such as the Rough Sleeping Initiative and Housing First”.<sup>26</sup>

Further information, statistics and briefings on homelessness policies in England can be found in the Library paper: [Rough Sleeping \(England\)](#).

### 2.2 Current state of HF services in England

The organisation [HF England](#), part of Homeless Link, conducted surveys of HF organisations in England in [2017](#) and [2020](#).

HF England maintains a list of all HF services in England that it has been contact with. This formed the basis the surveys in 2017 and 2020: 87 of 105 services identified responded in 2020 and 28 of 32 known services in 2017.<sup>27</sup> The figures below are based on information provided by respondents to the 2020 survey.

#### Support needs

HF England asked respondents what proportion of people had support needs when they entered their service in 2020. Of 65 respondents:

- 97% said “most” or “all” clients had substance misuse issues,
- 95% said “most” or “all” clients had a mental health issue,
- 88% reported “most” or “all” clients had been in contact with the criminal justice system.<sup>28</sup>

#### Provider profiles

The survey assessed the number of providers and their capacity, finances and sources of accommodation.

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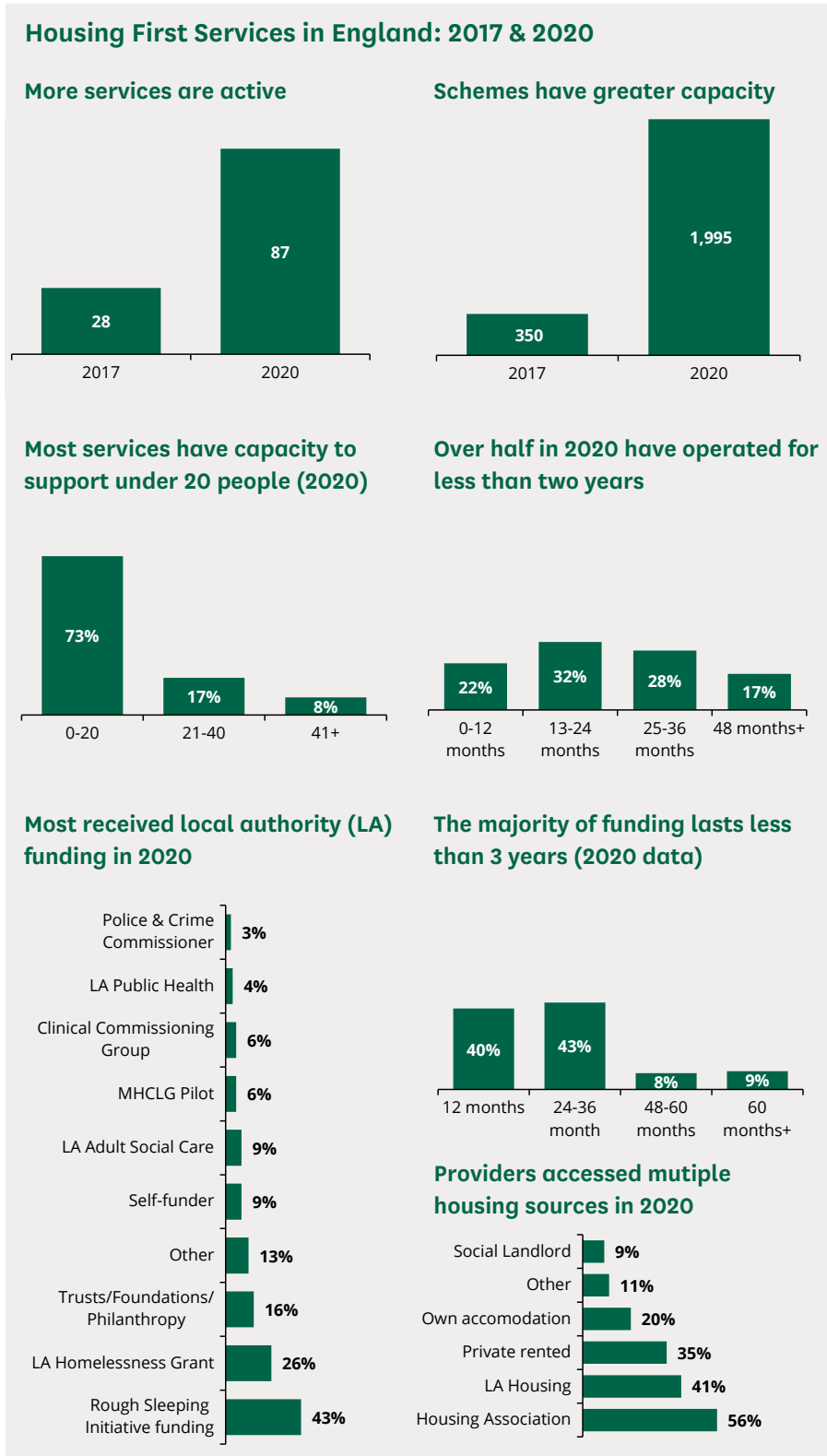
<sup>25</sup> MHCLG, [Government to lead national effort to end rough sleeping](#), 30 November 2017

<sup>26</sup> Conservative and Unionist Party, [Manifesto 2019](#), December 2019, p30

<sup>27</sup> HF England, [The picture of HF in England](#), 2017, p2; HF England, [The picture of HF in England 2020](#), 2020, p9

<sup>28</sup> HF England, [The picture of HF in England 2020](#), 2020, p22

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Notes: Information only from respondents identified and replying to HF England—the chart may be an underestimate of the number and profile of providers. Number of respondents may differ for each chart. Service providers may receive funding from multiple sources.

Source: HF England, [The picture of HF in England 2020](#), November 2020, pp12-20

### Third-sector comment on funding and accommodation

[Homeless Link](#) in 2015 said its engagement with providers suggested that the “biggest barrier” to a HF project was “access to suitable and

affordable accommodation in both the social and private rented sector”.<sup>29</sup> The charity reported that social landlords were hesitant to provide housing, as many HF participants had previously abandoned social tenancies, had rent arrears, or were banned from social housing due to anti-social behaviour.<sup>30</sup>

Organisations have also recommended longer-term funding settlements. For example, in 2017 the [Centre for Social Justice](#) proposed the provision of open-ended Government funding, either through taking the estimated savings from Government Departments, or encouraging the use of Social Impact Bonds.<sup>31</sup> In 2020, the [Centre](#) said the Government should also seek to consolidate funding streams for HF.<sup>32</sup>

In 2018, [Crisis](#) recommended funding HF via Housing Benefit to cover rental costs, reasoning that:

The benefit of this approach is that it reinforces the concept that getting a tenancy is not dependent on working with support services. The support could remain in place even if the person was no longer in that tenancy if, for example, they went to prison. Furthermore, separating the two funding streams would make it easier for one agency to provide housing and for a more specialist agency to provide the support package.<sup>33</sup>

## 2.3 HF Pilots and related programmes

The UK Government has supported several HF-pilots and HF-style programmes.

In June 2020, the Local Government Association (LGA) said there had been around 60 HF pilots at the local level in England since 2010.<sup>34</sup>

In February 2021, MHCLG published its [Mobilising HF toolkit: From planning to early implementation](#). This sets out further details on the pilots and suggested practices when commissioning, mobilising and delivering HF services in England.

### HF Pilots

In 2016/17, the then-Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) part-funded a feasibility study for the Liverpool City Region.<sup>35</sup> Following the [resulting report](#) in July 2017, in the [Autumn Budget 2017](#) and a [subsequent announcement](#) in May 2018, the UK Government said it would invest £28 million in three HF pilots:

- Liverpool City Region (£7.7m)

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<sup>29</sup> Homeless Link, [‘Housing First’ or ‘Housing Led’? The current picture of Housing First in England](#), June 2015, pp3-4

<sup>30</sup> [Ibid](#), p16

<sup>31</sup> Centre for Social Justice, [Housing-led solutions to rough sleeping and homelessness](#), March 2017, pp49-50

<sup>32</sup> Centre for Social Justice, [Close to home: Delivering a national HF programme in England](#), February 2021, p79

<sup>33</sup> Crisis, [Everybody In: How to end homelessness in Great Britain](#), 2018, p222

<sup>34</sup> Local Partnerships/LGA, [Local authority briefing: Housing people who were rough sleeping and those at risk who have been accommodated due to COVID-19](#), June 2020, para 4.2.4

<sup>35</sup> Crisis and others, [HF: A feasibility study for the Liverpool City region](#), 2017

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- Greater Manchester (£8.0m)
- West Midlands (£9.6m).<sup>36</sup>

The pilots intended to support around 1,000 rough sleepers and those at risk of rough sleeping with the most complex needs,<sup>37</sup> and provide wrap-around support, including mental health, drugs and alcohol misuse support.<sup>38</sup> In the first instance, the pilots were to run for three years with a further two years of legacy support for individuals still engaged with the pilots. Funding for the pilots has been extended to 2023.<sup>39</sup>

The Ministry has said that the pilots adhere to seven HF principles (see section 1.2) and mean that individuals should be supported to exercise choice and control (e.g. access to a bank account, if appropriate).<sup>40</sup> In August/September 2019, the pilots were rated between medium and high on compliance with the seven individual HF principles.<sup>41</sup>

To September 2019, a total of 326 individuals had been recruited and 105 housed across the three pilots. The 2020 evaluation said numbers were lower than expected because of delays to the commissioning process and time taken to mobilise services and build relationships.<sup>42</sup>

In February 2021, MHCLG [said](#) it would use the findings from its evaluation (see section 3.2) and experiences from the pilots “to inform next steps”.<sup>43</sup>

### **Rough Sleeping Accommodation Programme (RSAP)**

The RSAP aims to deliver up to 6,000 units of supported move-on accommodation for rough sleepers to 2024.<sup>44</sup>

In November 2020 MHCLG said experiences from the HF pilots had informed RSAP practices:

We have learnt from that work, and that is very much the impetus behind the rough sleeping accommodation programme, because every individual who goes into one of these 6,000 new homes will be given wraparound care for mental health, addiction, substance abuse and all the other things that they need to begin to rebuild their lives.<sup>45</sup>

### **Rough Sleeping Initiative (RSI)**

RSI funding seeks to support the establishment or enhancement of coordinated local services for rough sleepers or those at risk of sleeping rough.<sup>46</sup> The first RSI was launched in March 2018.

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<sup>36</sup> HM Treasury, [Autumn Budget 2017](#), 22 November 2017 para 5.34;

<sup>37</sup> HCWS671, [Housing First](#), 9 May 2018

<sup>38</sup> PQ 54945 [[Sleeping rough](#)], 9 June 2020

<sup>39</sup> MHCLG, [Evaluation of the HF pilots: Interim process evaluation report](#), 2020, foreword

<sup>40</sup> PQ 75345 [[Homelessness: Bank Services](#)], 22 July 2020

<sup>41</sup> MHCLG, [Evaluation of the HF pilots: Interim process evaluation report](#), 2020, pvii

<sup>42</sup> MHCLG, [Evaluation of HF pilots: Interim process evaluation report](#), 2020, section 4.1

<sup>43</sup> PQ 144650 [[HF](#)], 4 February 2021

<sup>44</sup> MHCLG, [Letting accommodation funded through the RSAP: Guidance for local authorities and private registered providers](#), updated 23 February 2021

<sup>45</sup> HC Deb, [Rough sleepers: Accommodation](#), 16 November 2020, c3

<sup>46</sup> HCWS69, [RSI allocation of additional funding for 2020/21](#), 28 January 2020

The MHCLG [2020 evaluation](#) of HF said “relationships established under other initiatives, for example the Rough Sleeping initiative (RSI), were described as reaping benefits for the implementation of Housing First”, through their previous engagement between housing providers and specialist support services.<sup>47</sup>

## 2.4 UK Government evaluation of HF

### MHCLG report on HF pilots, December 2020

The MHCLG’s [HF pilots: Interim process evaluation report](#) (December 2020) provides learning and recommendations, based on two visits to each of the three pilot areas and qualitative field work.

The Ministry also published [HF: Effects of the pandemic](#) (December 2020) which assessed the impact of the pandemic on [HF users and pilot projects](#). The research found the pandemic had resulted in less face to face intensive support with service users and disrupted routines. For some individuals, this had led to a decline in mental health and “in extreme cases” to individuals being sectioned under the Mental Health Act.<sup>48</sup>

The [main evaluation document](#) said it was too early to report outcomes, but providers were able to “give examples of positive engagement with individuals known to local homelessness services for many years and for whom little had previously been achieved”.<sup>49</sup>

Concerns raised included the availability of:

- A suitably experienced provider base with the capacity to deliver HF at scale.
- Support workers in each area to fill posts. Providers said this had happened slower than expected and relationship building with users was “protracted due to the time needed to build trust”.
- Single bedroom properties due to the perceived impact of the spare room subsidy and other competition for accommodation.
- Private rental properties and their cost as providers sought to expand beyond social housing and offer greater choice.<sup>50</sup>

The [evaluation](#) also reported that there were challenges in establishing effective working relationships with specialist providers, in particular mental health trusts, when dealing with substance misuse and mental health problems.<sup>51</sup>

The [evaluation](#) made several recommendations for providers, related services and the Ministry. These included:

- Allowing a longer lead-time after funding is confirmed before delivery is expected, to enable relationship building and securing service commitments.

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<sup>47</sup> MHCLG, [Evaluation of HF pilots: Interim process evaluation report](#), 2020, pxiv

<sup>48</sup> MHCLG, [Effects of the pandemic on the HF pilots and service users](#), 2020, p13

<sup>49</sup> MHCLG, [Evaluation of HF pilots: Interim process evaluation report](#), 2020, pxiv

<sup>50</sup> [Ibid](#), ppix, x, xi, xii-xiii

<sup>51</sup> [Ibid](#), pxiv

- Considering routes to service sustainability and to sustain the progress made by users beyond the pilot period.
- Prioritising steps to ensure the fidelity of the HF services.
- Engaging private sector landlords and identifying new opportunities in both the private and social housing sectors.<sup>52</sup>

### **HF Pilots and the Shared Accommodation Rate**

Organisations such as [Crisis](#) and the [Centre for Social Justice](#) have recommended exempting users of HF services from the Shared Accommodation Rate (SAR).<sup>53</sup> The SAR limits the amount of Local Housing Allowance a single person under 35 can claim to cover the cost of a room in shared accommodation within the locality. Crisis states:

Under 35s shared room rate: This effectively means that the benefits system will not fund accommodation for this age group unless it is in a shared house, which is a real challenge to the Housing First model [...]<sup>54</sup>

In 2018, the DWP [said](#) it was “exploring the introduction of an exemption from the [SAR] for the Government-backed pilots of Housing First”. This was to be “captured through the planned evaluation of the pilots and factored in to further roll-outs of Housing First.”<sup>55</sup> No statement was made regarding SAR in the 2020 evaluation. However, [Budget 2020](#) announced an extension of exemptions from the SAR to include:

...rough sleepers aged 16-24, care leavers up to the age of 25, and victims of domestic abuse and human trafficking.<sup>56</sup>

## **2.5 Parliamentary reports**

### **APPG on Ending Homelessness, 2021**

In February 2021, the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) [announced](#) it would hold an enquiry into HF, focusing on how it could be scaled up in England. The intention is to publish by May 2021.<sup>57</sup>

### **Housing, Communities and Local Government (HCLG) Committee, 2020**

The report of the [HCLG Committee’s inquiry into protecting rough sleepers and renters through the pandemic](#) encouraged the UK Government to publish the result of the HF pilots and to “accelerate the delivery of HF across the country, to help increase the availability of wraparound support services alongside good-quality accommodation”.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> [Ibid](#), pp xv-xvi

<sup>53</sup> Centre for Social Justice, [HF: Housing-led solutions to rough sleeping and homelessness](#), March 2017, p16

<sup>54</sup> Crisis, [Implementing HF across England, Scotland and Wales](#), 2018, pp19, 31-

<sup>55</sup> MHCLG, [Rough sleeping strategy: Delivery plan](#), December 2018, p34

<sup>56</sup> [HC 121, March 2020](#), para 1.190

<sup>57</sup> APPG on ending homelessness, enquiry, 5 October 2020

<sup>58</sup> HCLG, [Protecting rough sleepers and renters](#), HC 309, 20 May 2020, para 9



In response, the [Government](#) said HF had an “impressive record” and referred to the need to evaluate the pilots before committing to further implementation in England:

While Housing First will not be appropriate for everyone, we strongly support the concept of providing stable, affordable housing alongside other forms of wrap-around support. As well as Housing First, we have funded other housing-led solutions through the Rough Sleeping Initiative (RSI). Together, these programmes are getting some of the most vulnerable people off the streets, supporting their recovery from a variety of complex issues and helping them to sustain their tenancies.

To be certain that we can fully assess the wider implementation of Housing First in this country, we took the decision to pilot at scale in three city regions with contrasting challenges. We also commissioned a consortium, led by ICF, to conduct an evaluation of the programme which will run for the course of the pilots. We recognise that rough sleeping is a nationwide challenge, which is why it is important that we consider the findings of our evaluation, together with the outcomes from our three pilots, to ensure that we know how Housing First could be most effective on a larger scale.<sup>59</sup>

### **Communities and Local Government Select Committee, 2017**

The House of Commons Communities and Local Government Select Committee in its 2017 [report into Homelessness](#) expressed caution about the HF model, whilst acknowledging its success in Finland:

[...] We are cautious about investing further in Housing First in England because of the severity of England’s homelessness challenge and the scarcity of funding and of social housing. Many people have been on social housing registers for over ten years and are therefore likely to be concerned by what might be seen as a means of jumping the queue. We acknowledge and commend the work delivered through existing Housing First pilots but we believe that resources should be focussed on supporting more mainstream efforts to tackle homelessness and prevent instances of entrenched homelessness.<sup>60</sup>

### **APPG on Ending Homelessness, 2017**

In July 2017, the APPG for Ending Homelessness published a report into [Homelessness prevention for care leavers, prison leavers and survivors of domestic violence](#) which recommended that Government should fund a HF model for survivors of domestic abuse.<sup>61</sup>

## **2.6 Third-sector commentary.**

This section provides a brief overview of recent commentary on HF in England.

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<sup>59</sup> MHCLG, [Government response to the HCLG Select Committee report on protecting rough sleepers and renters](#), CP248, June 2020, p6

<sup>60</sup> Communities and Local Government Committee, [Homelessness](#), HC 40, August 2016, p30

<sup>61</sup> [Homelessness prevention for care leavers, prison leavers and survivors of domestic violence](#), All-Party Parliamentary Group for Ending Homelessness, July 2017, p13

## Coronavirus

The Housing Advisory Group's [Scaling up HF in the post-lockdown phase](#) (July 2020) said its members "stood ready to support the scale up of [HF]" for people with multiple disadvantages residing in hotels during the coronavirus pandemic.<sup>62</sup> The group includes thirteen organisations, including Crisis and the Chartered Institute of Housing.

The group recommended that the Government commit long-term funding for 16,500 HF tenancies over the current Parliament (to 2024) and ensure a supply of suitable homes to meet the scale of HF.<sup>63</sup>

The British Medical Association, in a [position statement on Coronavirus and homelessness in England](#) said it "supports the 'Housing First' approach as a solution for more homeless people to engage in health services".<sup>64</sup>

## Implementing HF: Centre for Social Justice, 2021

The Centre for Social Justice report, [Close to Home \(2021\)](#), argued for a national HF scheme offering around 16,450 places to meet demand in England.<sup>65</sup> The report called for the scaling up of the programme and the inclusion of further analysis to scope HF's impact on health, justice and other services.<sup>66</sup> It estimated the total cost would be £451 million over three years (£9,300 per place).<sup>67</sup>

One of the "key learning points" from the city region pilots was, the Centre argued, that "time must be built into the scaling up process to allow commissioners to prepare the ground for Housing First", requiring preparatory work in 2021 to result in an effective programme from winter 2021/22.<sup>68</sup> A "key constraint" was the availability of housing. The Centre argued that issues in the allocation of social housing and partnership working with all types of providers would need to be resolved before the programme began.<sup>69</sup>

The Centre recommended that local targets be set to meet the level of identified need and for this to reflect local authority assessments and existing homelessness strategies.<sup>70</sup>

The 2021 report was backed by the charity [St Mungo's](#).<sup>71</sup>

The Centre previously published a [report](#) in 2017 recommending the implementation of HF in England.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Housing Advisory Group, [Scaling up HF in the post-lockdown phase](#), July 2020, p1

<sup>63</sup> [Ibid](#), p2

<sup>64</sup> British Medical Association, [BMA position statement on COVID-19 and homelessness in England](#), August 2020, p4

<sup>65</sup> Centre for Social Justice, [Close to home: Delivering a national HF programme in England](#), 2021

<sup>66</sup> [Ibid](#), pp66, 73-4

<sup>67</sup> [Ibid](#), p83

<sup>68</sup> [Ibid](#), pp74-5

<sup>69</sup> [Ibid](#), p86

<sup>70</sup> [Ibid](#), p81

<sup>71</sup> St Mungo's, [St Mungo's supports call for Government to significant expand "HF"](#), 19 February 2021

<sup>72</sup> Centre for Social Justice, [HF: Housing led solutions to rough sleeping and homelessness](#), March 2017, p14

### **Implementing HF: Crisis, Homeless Link and St Mungo's**

A report for St Mungo's on [assessing the impact of HF in Brighton and Westminster](#) (2019) emphasised that homelessness projects should "remain housing first, not housing only" and that the provision of accommodation should not be separated from person-centred support.<sup>73</sup>

Crisis, [Everybody In: How to end homelessness in Great Britain](#) (2018) made several recommendations for HF in the UK. This included a national director for HF, local and national targets and reforming the rules surrounding benefits payments. For example, it suggested exempting under-35s from the shared accommodation rate for their housing benefits if participating in a HF programme.<sup>74</sup>

The charity [Homeless Link](#) has also called for the scaling up of HF as one of a range of approaches to reduce homelessness.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> University of Salford for St Mungo's, [Assessing the impact of HF in Brighton and Westminster](#), December 2019, conclusion

<sup>74</sup> Crisis, [The plan to end homelessness](#), 2018, ch9

<sup>75</sup> Housing First England, [Making HF an effective intervention](#), u.d.

## 3. Wales

### 3.1 Government guidance

#### Support for HF, 2018-present

In 2018, the Welsh Government's [Rough Sleeping Action Plan](#) said that "for many people, HF offers an effective solution" and committed to encouraging the application of HF principles.<sup>76</sup> Support for HF was re-confirmed in the Welsh Government's 2019 [Homelessness strategy](#).<sup>77</sup>

Accompanying the 2018 Action Plan, the Welsh Government published [HF- National principles and guidance for Wales](#) (February 2018) to support local authorities and partners, including social landlords, to use HF as part of their policies to tackle homelessness in Wales.<sup>78</sup> Statutory guidance on planning and applying HF was also expected.<sup>79</sup>

The Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee in their report, [Life on the streets](#) (April 2018), expressed concern that "some authorities may be more reluctant to develop and implement Housing First models", given potential cost implications and the need to commission alternative services.<sup>80</sup>

The Committee recommended the Welsh Government consider making HF the default approach to rough sleepers.<sup>81</sup> This was accepted in principle by the Government in June 2018, who said it would consider strengthening the guidance.<sup>82</sup> The guidance has not been revised.

#### Coronavirus and HF

The Welsh Government's [Phase 2- Planning guidance for homelessness and housing support services](#) (June 2020) requested authorities develop a Phase 2 Plan to ensure the long-term resettlement of those in temporary accommodation and manage the anticipated increase in homelessness as lockdown measures were eased. A total of £20 million was available for homelessness services.<sup>83</sup>

These plans, the Welsh Government said, should "put rapid re-housing at the heart of services and utilise a range of support models", including HF. The guidance said HF:

Should be the default approach for those with very complex needs with a history of repeat homelessness/rough sleeping and/or difficulty in sustaining any forms of accommodation (be that hostel, supported or independent).<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Welsh Government, [Rough sleeping action plan](#), February 2018, para 13

<sup>77</sup> Welsh Government, [Strategy for preventing and ending homelessness](#), October 2019, p4

<sup>78</sup> Welsh Government, [HF- National principles and guidance for Wales](#), 2018, pp1-5

<sup>79</sup> [Ibid](#), p6

<sup>80</sup> Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee, [Life on the streets: Preventing and tackling rough sleeping in Wales](#), April 2018, paras 249-50

<sup>81</sup> [Ibid](#), para 249-50

<sup>82</sup> Welsh Government, [Response to recommendations from the Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee](#), June 2018, p11

<sup>83</sup> Welsh Government, [Written Statement: Phase 2 Homelessness Plan](#), 28 May 2020

<sup>84</sup> Welsh Government, [Phase 2- Planning guidance for homelessness and housing related support services](#), June 2020, pp7, 11

## 3.2 Government funding & evaluation

In February 2018, the Welsh Government said it had funded 10 housing first pilot projects, including in Bridgend, Blaenau Gwent, Merthyr Tydfil, Cardiff, Conwy and Swansea.<sup>85</sup>

The then-Housing Minister, Rebecca Evans, said as a condition of receiving funding, local authorities would be required to report on the scheme's effectiveness to the Welsh Government, who would use the information to update the "living documents", launched in February 2018.<sup>86</sup>

In June 2018, the Welsh Government launched a ministerial group to advise on both youth homelessness and the implementation of the HF approach across Wales (see section 3.3).<sup>87</sup>

## 3.3 Reports and evaluations

The [Homelessness Action Group](#), established by the Welsh Government, recommended in both their [October 2019](#) and [March 2020 reports](#) that HF be adopted as part of the default approach taken to support people who are at risk of homelessness or rough sleeping:

[The Welsh Government should] provide national leadership on the scaling up of Housing First, including ensuring adherence to the well-evidenced fidelity model and that it is available to every individual who needs this particular solution.

Local authorities should [...] define what an RRTP [Rapid Rehousing Transition Plans] should include to ensure that rapid rehousing and Housing First do not become optional 'add-ons' but are fundamental components of a local housing and homelessness plan.<sup>88</sup>

The Welsh Government accepted this recommendation in principle.<sup>89</sup>

### Further information

Cymorth Cymru, an umbrella organisation for providers of homelessness, housing related support and social care services in Wales, have published [guides and evaluations on HF in Wales](#).

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<sup>85</sup> Senedd Cymru/Welsh Parliament, [Plenary](#), 6 February 2018, cc 236, 249

<sup>86</sup> Senedd Cymru/Welsh Parliament, [Plenary](#), 6 February 2018, c249

<sup>87</sup> Welsh Government, [New ministerial group to tackle homelessness in Wales launched](#), 19 June 2018

<sup>88</sup> Homelessness Action Group, [The framework of policies, approaches and plans needed to end homelessness in Wales](#), March 2020, pp53-4

<sup>89</sup> Welsh Government, [Written Statement: COVID-19 response—Homelessness and Rough Sleepers](#), 20 March 2020

## 4. Scotland

### 4.1 Government position

In 2017, First Minister Nicola Sturgeon said HF would be strengthened in Scotland:

We know that providing a home is not the only support that people—particularly vulnerable people—need, and that is why our current priorities include strengthening the development of approaches such as housing first, which is currently being piloted in Glasgow. It provides permanent accommodation alongside intensive peer support to help individuals with complex needs to sustain their accommodation.<sup>90</sup>

In [Ending homelessness together](#) (2018), the Scottish Government and Convention of Scottish Local Authorities confirmed they would “ensure a national shift towards rapid rehousing by default, including Housing First, to prevent homelessness by prioritising settled housing for all”.<sup>91</sup> The Plan included three main commitments relating to HF:

- For authorities to submit a rapid rehousing transition plan by the end of 2018.<sup>92</sup> At January 2020, 30 of 32 local areas had included HF within their transition plan.<sup>93</sup>
- Supporting five Housing First pathfinder cities (see section 4.2).
- Seeking partnership with health and justice bodies as the HF approach is imbedded.<sup>94</sup> In January 2020, the Scottish Government said it would work further with NHS bodies regarding homelessness.<sup>95</sup>

#### Coronavirus

In response to the Coronavirus pandemic, an updated [Ending Homelessness Together Plan](#) was published in October 2020. This said that the Scottish Government would “build on the success of the Housing First pathfinder and scale up Housing First more rapidly”.<sup>96</sup>

#### Housing First national development framework

An [HF development framework](#) was published for consultation from November to December 2020. The framework was drafted by Homelessness Network Scotland and is intended to provide advice to both governments and professionals regarding HF in Scotland.

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<sup>90</sup> Scottish Parliament Official Report, [18 May 2017](#), c23

<sup>91</sup> Scottish Government and Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, [Ending homelessness together](#), 2018, p26

<sup>92</sup> Scottish Government and Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, [Ending homelessness together](#), 2018, p26

<sup>93</sup> Scottish Government, [Ending homelessness action plan: Annual report](#), January 2020, Action 17

<sup>94</sup> Scottish Government and Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, [Ending homelessness together](#), 2018, p27

<sup>95</sup> Scottish Government, [Ending homelessness action plan: Annual report](#), January 2020, Action 19

<sup>96</sup> Scottish Government, [Ending homelessness together: updated action plan—October 2020](#), October 2020 ‘What is in our updated action plan?’

## 4.2 Pilots

### Glasgow, 2010-13

Turning Point Scotland ran a Housing First pilot in Glasgow between 2010 and 2013 for 22 individuals. It [remains active](#).

Researchers at Heriot-Watt University evaluated the pilot, finding that 18 of the 22 service users had been allocated an independent tenancy by the project's end in 2013.<sup>97</sup> Of non-housing needs, the report found a general improvement regarding health, substance misuse, involvement with the criminal justice system and financial wellbeing.<sup>98</sup>

### HF Pathfinder Cities

From December 2018 to March 2022, the Scottish Government, together with Social Bite and Merchant's House, intends to secure up to 830 HF placements. The Government also intends to support a HF training academy.<sup>99</sup>

The [project is active in five local authority areas](#): Glasgow, Edinburgh, Aberdeen, Stirling and Dundee and provides "wrap around" support for participants.

The pathfinder was a response to the recommendations of the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Action Group (see section 4.3).<sup>100</sup>

#### How is the pilot progressing?

At 31 December 2020, the Pathfinder Project had delivered 404 tenancies, of which 355 people (88%) remained in their tenancies. Reasons for terminating tenancies included abandonment, death and long-term prison sentences.<sup>101</sup>

Heriot Watt University publishes [annual reports](#) on the pathfinder. The latest was published in May 2020. This found that most people on the pathfinder were male (69%), aged 26-49 (74%) and White Scottish (90%).<sup>102</sup> For outcomes, the report said:

- Tenancy sustainment was then 92% (252 tenancies), which the report said "compares very favourably to European and other international models".<sup>103</sup>
- The average length of time moving into HF tenancies was shorter than the time usually spent in temporary accommodation: 114 days for HF compared to 200 days (2018/19).<sup>104</sup>

[Monthly HF trackers](#) are published by Homeless Network Scotland.

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<sup>97</sup> Turning Point Scotland and Heriot Watt University, [Turning Point Scotland's HF project evaluation](#), 2013, p20

<sup>98</sup> [Ibid](#), p vi.

<sup>99</sup> Scottish Government, [Ending homelessness action plan: Annual report](#), January 2020, Action 18

<sup>100</sup> Scottish Government, [HF](#), 9 October 2018

<sup>101</sup> Housing First Scotland, [HF tracker](#), January 2021, accessed via Homelessness Network Scotland, [Pathfinder latest](#)

<sup>102</sup> Heriot Watt, [HF check-up](#), May 2020, p8

<sup>103</sup> [Ibid](#), p10

<sup>104</sup> [Ibid](#), p12

## 4.3 Reports

### **Homeless Network Scotland, 2020**

Homeless Network Scotland's [A national framework to start-up and scale-up HF in Scotland](#) includes a discussion of what has been learnt from pilots and pathfinders in Scotland from 2010 to 2018.

Challenges the report identified included limiting household choice due to lack of involvement of landlords, repeating traditional processes of assessment and referral, limiting people's access to services, and the need for HF-specific training to deliver intensive HF support services.<sup>105</sup>

### **Local Government and Communities Committee, 2018**

In 2018, the Scottish Parliament's Local Government and Communities Committee published a [Report on Homelessness](#). The Committee recommended that the Scottish Government implement a "Scottish HF policy" and consider how budgets from different agencies may be best aligned to fund wrap-around support and preventative measures.<sup>106</sup>

### **Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Action Group, 2018**

The Scottish Government's Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Action Group report on [Ending rough sleeping in Scotland](#) recommended that the Scottish Government "announce a default to HF as part of a rapid rehousing model for people sleeping rough and experiencing multiple forms of exclusion":<sup>107</sup>

The default for anyone at risk of homelessness has to be to rehouse them in secure and settled mainstream accommodation straight away, recognising that this will represent a significant shift from the current system. The overwhelming evidence is that for people with complex needs who are sleeping rough or at risk of sleeping rough the most effective solution is Housing First.<sup>108</sup>

In 2018 the Scottish Government said measures to tackle homelessness would include "moving to a 'HF' model for those with most complex needs".<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> Homeless Network's Scotland, [A national framework to start-up and scale-up HF in Scotland](#), 2020, section 4

<sup>106</sup> Scottish Parliament Local Government and Communities Committee, [Report on Homelessness](#), February 2018, para 229-30

<sup>107</sup> Homeless and Rough Sleeping Action Group, [Ending rough sleeping in Scotland: An interim report](#), March 2018, p15

<sup>108</sup> [Ibid](#), p5

<sup>109</sup> Scottish Government, [Action to end rough sleeping](#), 7 March 2018



## 5. Northern Ireland

### 5.1 Executive Guidance

The Northern Ireland Housing Executive's [Homelessness Strategy for Northern Ireland 2017-22](#) intends to build on the "HF NI pathway model" developed during the previous Strategy, including examining the potential for other types of housing-led models.<sup>110</sup>

The Northern Ireland Assembly Research Service published [HF: An alternative approach to addressing homelessness?](#) in 2017.

### 5.2 Depaul scheme and evaluation

A HF scheme was piloted by the [charity Depaul](#) in Belfast in 2014, with support from the Northern Ireland Housing Executive.

An [evaluation](#) was published by North Harbour Consulting in 2016. This found that by the end of 2014:

- 19 out of the 24 service users were still in their tenancy (a retention rate of 79%).
- The cost of HF per service user, per week, in 2014 was £128 (reducing to £80 in 2015). This compared to £217 per unit per week for accommodation-based services for single homeless people.
- Benefits included development of self-care and budgeting skills.<sup>111</sup>

The charity Depaul remains active in Belfast and Derry/Londonderry. A [report by Fidelity](#) in 2018 reported that there were a further 87 successful placements made by the Belfast and Derry/Londonderry providers from 2015 to 2017: 78% of service users remained in accommodation after two years in Belfast, and 72% in Derry/Londonderry.<sup>112</sup>

In June 2020, the charity argued that the "rollout of the HF model should be costed, funded and implemented throughout Northern Ireland" as part of the Coronavirus exit strategy.<sup>113</sup>

An [evaluation](#) of the 2012-2017 Homelessness Strategy was commissioned by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive. This included interviews with those working in strategic and service delivery areas.<sup>114</sup> Regarding HF, respondents reported it was "seen as offering potential to prevent recurrent homelessness, but within an array of services, including lower intensity support models".<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> Housing Executive, [Homelessness strategy for Northern Ireland, 2017-2022](#), 2017, para 4.3.2

<sup>111</sup> North Harbour Consulting, [The efficiency and effectiveness of HF support service piloted by Depaul in Belfast](#), October 2016, pp7, 54, 55, 95

<sup>112</sup> Depaul and Fidelity Assessment, [HF: Leading the way together](#), June 2018, p20

<sup>113</sup> Depaul, [Post Covid-19 priorities](#), June 2020

<sup>114</sup> F. Boyle and N. Pleace, [The homelessness strategy for Northern Ireland 2012-2017. An evaluation](#), January 2017, p15

<sup>115</sup> [Ibid](#), p 35

## 6. FAQs: Applying HF

This section summaries UK and international research on HF schemes, their challenges, and their impacts. MHCLG's [2020 evaluation](#) of the three pilots announced in 2017 notes that for the UK, the evidence base on the effectiveness of HF "has been limited to a number of primarily qualitative evaluations of small localised pilot projects".<sup>116</sup>

Future editions of the MHCLG evaluation will include a quantitative evaluation of the programme and a cost benefit analysis.<sup>117</sup>

Note that accommodation-based services differ from state to state and other societal and financial factors may influence the impact of HF schemes.<sup>118</sup> The HF model applied across the world also differs, and the definition of HF has been much debated—this will impact on how far lessons may be drawn for UK HF programmes.<sup>119</sup>

### 6.1 What happened in the Finnish case?

Finland's homelessness strategy from 2008 is often cited as an example of HF's effectiveness in reducing long-term homelessness.<sup>120</sup>

An [international evaluation](#) commissioned by the Finnish Government in 2015 found:

In 2008, 2,931 people were long-term homeless in the ten biggest cities. This number had dropped to 2,192 in late 2013, a reduction of 25%. Numbers of long-term homeless people fell from 45% to 36% of the total homeless population between 2008 and 2011. This is a major achievement in which the use of Housing First services played a crucial role.<sup>121</sup>

Overall, the number of long-term homeless people in Finland has fallen from around 3,500 in 2008 to around 1,000 in 2019.<sup>122</sup> The 2015 report noted, however, that HF did not work for a minority of long-term homeless,<sup>123</sup> and a 2018 report acknowledged women's homelessness had not decreased and the challenge of homeless migrants remained.<sup>124</sup>

Several programmes have been in place in Finland. The Finnish Government's PAAVO programmes (2008-2015) targeted long-term homeless people.<sup>125</sup> PAAVO was subsequently followed by the AUNE

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<sup>116</sup> MHCLG, [Evaluation of the HF pilot process evaluation report](#), 2020, p2

<sup>117</sup> [Ibid](#), foreword

<sup>118</sup> N. Pleace, [Using HF in integrated homelessness strategies: A review of the evidence](#), 2018, pp15-17

<sup>119</sup> N. Pleace, [The ambiguities, limits and risks of HF from a European perspective](#), *European Journal of Homelessness*, 5, 2011, pp113-22

<sup>120</sup> For example, Communities and Local Government Committee, [Homelessness](#), HC 40, 2016, p30; Scottish Parliament Local Government and Communities Committee, [Report on homelessness](#), 2018, paras 229-30

<sup>121</sup> N. Pleace et al for the Ministry of the Environment, [The Finnish homelessness strategy: An international review](#), 2015, p60

<sup>122</sup> The Housing Finance and Development Centre of Finland, [Homelessness in Finland 2019](#), accessed 18 February 2021

<sup>123</sup> N. Pleace et al for the Ministry of the Environment, [The Finnish homelessness strategy: An international review](#), 2015, p84

<sup>124</sup> Y Foundation, [A home of your own: HF and ending homelessness in Finland](#), p95

<sup>125</sup> See Housing First, [The Finnish national programme to reduce long-term homelessness I \(PAAVO I\)](#) and [Reducing long-term homelessness 2012-2015](#)

programme (2016-19), focusing on prevention. From 2020 to 2027, the Government intends to end homelessness and “continue to operate according to the HF principle”.<sup>126</sup>

As part of the programmes, the number of supported housing and independent rental apartments available in Helsinki increased from 2,585 to 4,294 from 2008 to 2016, whilst the number of hostels and shelters fell from 558 to 52.<sup>127</sup> Savings in terms of services were estimated to be up to 9,600 euros per person per year compared to the costs if that person had been homeless.<sup>128</sup>

### **What reasons have been cited for its success?**

The [2015 international evaluation](#) said “commitment and shared will” between central and local government in a long-term, incentivised funded plan was important in reducing homelessness, whilst recognising that there were also “several background factors at play”.<sup>129</sup>

Research before the scheme identified weaknesses in previous housing strategies, such as deficient service support, few appropriate building sites and lack of finance and coordination.<sup>130</sup>

A [comparative study](#) of Danish, Finnish and Swedish homelessness strategies in 2016 said the Finnish decision to “convert emergency shelters into communal units” and “focus on building, buying and renovating apartments”, due to the financial commitments made, was “key to the reduction of homelessness” and marked out the Finnish case from the traditional HF model.<sup>131</sup>

The Y-Foundation, representing several HF stakeholders, including the Association of Finnish Local and Regional Authorities, produced [25 recommendations](#) following the Finnish experience in 2016/17 and, in 2018, [14 means](#) through which Finland reduced and prevents the recurrence of homelessness.<sup>132</sup>

Housing First Europe’s [Finland page](#) includes more research on the Finnish case.

### **Have other countries reduced the number of homeless with HF?**

Comparing the number of homeless people across countries is difficult, as there is no single definition of homelessness.

The OECD maintains an affordable housing database. This estimates that over the last decade, nine OECD countries saw homelessness rates fall or remain stable. This included Norway (40% drop, 2012-16) and

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<sup>126</sup> Finnish Government, [Housing Policy](#), Objective 3

<sup>127</sup> [Ibid](#), p30

<sup>128</sup> [Ibid](#), p12

<sup>129</sup> N. Pleace et al for the Ministry of the Environment, [The Finnish homelessness strategy; An international review](#), 2015, p3

<sup>130</sup> Housing First Finland, [The Finnish National Programme to Reduce Long-term homelessness I \(PAAVO I\)](#), accessed 18 February 2021

<sup>131</sup> L. Benjaminsen and M. Knutağård, [Homelessness research and policy development: Examples from Nordic countries](#), European Journal of Homelessness, 10, 2016, p55

<sup>132</sup> Y Foundation, [A home of your own: HF and ending homelessness in Finland](#), 2018, pp88-93 and Appendix 1.

Finland (39% drop, 2010-18). Norway also has elements of HF.<sup>133</sup> Other nations cited as experiencing a fall in homelessness or stability in homelessness numbers by the OECD include Israel, Canada, Austria, Sweden, Poland and Denmark.<sup>134</sup> The OECD [reports](#) that HF is in operation at the national or local level in Austria, Canada, Sweden and Denmark and is “under consideration” in Israel.<sup>135</sup>

### What was the UK Government’s response?

MHCLG [said](#) in 2018 that the Ministry visited Finland to see the approach first hand and invited Peter Fredrikson, a former senior advisor to the Finnish Government on Housing First and homelessness, to sit on the Rough Sleeping Advisory Panel, which helped the Government produce the [Rough Sleeping Strategy](#).<sup>136</sup> A pilot for England was also announced (see section 2.3).

## 6.2 What is the impact of HF on housing retention rates?

International studies of HF projects tend to report higher housing retention rates amongst users with complex needs compared to existing programmes.<sup>137</sup>

The University of York academics, Nicholas Pleace and Joanne Bretherton, [stated in 2013](#) that “rates of housing sustainment are high, often in excess of 80 per cent of service users” across HF schemes.<sup>138</sup> In 2016, Pleace [summarised the evidence](#) from European examples:

In 2013, the Housing First Europe project reported that 97% of the high-need homeless people using the Discus Housing First service in Amsterdam were still in their housing after 12 months in the service. In Copenhagen, the rate was 94% overall, with a similarly impressive level reported by the Turning Point Housing First service in Glasgow (92%). The Casas Primeiro Housing First service in Lisbon reported a rate of 79%.

The French Un Chez-Soi d’abord Housing First programme reported interim results in late 2013, showing 80% of the 172 homeless people using Housing First services in the four city pilot sites had retained their housing for 13 months [...]

In 2015, the Housing First service in Vienna reported that, among all the service users worked with over a two-year period, 98% were still in their apartments<sup>139</sup>

In 2017, an [international evidence review](#) for Crisis additionally stated that smaller HF projects rolled out by third sector agencies see the

<sup>133</sup> L. Benjaminsen and M. Knutagård, [Homelessness research and policy development: Examples from Nordic countries](#), European Journal of Homelessness, 10, 2016, p50

<sup>134</sup> OECD, [HC3.1. Homeless population](#), updated 3 March 2020, accessed via [Homeless Hub](#)

<sup>135</sup> OECD, [HC3.2 National strategies for combatting homelessness](#), updated 23 June 2020

<sup>136</sup> PQ HL 10189 [HF], 21 September 2018

<sup>137</sup> N. Pleace, [Using Housing First in Integrated Homelessness Strategies: A Review of the Evidence](#), 2018, p24

<sup>138</sup> N. Pleace and J. Bretherton, [The case for HF in the EU: A critical evaluation of concerns about effectiveness](#), European Journal of Homelessness, 7, 2013, p27

<sup>139</sup> N. Pleace, [HF guide: Europe](#), 2016, p20

highest retention rates, but noted that few studies have evaluated housing retention on HF schemes for more than two years.<sup>140</sup>

[Research](#) also routinely finds there are typically “5-20% of service users, for whom Housing First is not able to provide a sustained exit from homelessness”.<sup>141</sup> Researchers have also cautioned against “overreach” of HF services.<sup>142</sup>

### 6.3 Who benefits most from HF?

The [Survey of HF in England](#) (2020) found that two-thirds of each service’s clients are male, and the majority work with those aged 35-59.<sup>143</sup>

#### High and complex needs

[HF England](#) stresses that HF works best with homeless people with multiple and complex needs. It defines “multiple and complex needs” as “persistent and unrelated health and social care needs”. These may include: entrenched street homelessness, mental, psychological or emotional health needs, drug and/or alcohol dependency, contact with the criminal justice system, experience of domestic violence and physical health needs.<sup>144</sup>

#### Young people and families

One [study in 2019](#) stated that whilst HF “has shown promise” in combatting homelessness amongst single adult males, less is known about its effectiveness when applied to families and young adults.<sup>145</sup>

[Evaluations of Canadian HF schemes](#) for those aged 16-24 found high rates of retention, though for some young people independent living was isolating and “could become an enabling environment for drug use”. Evaluators suggested that health and other issues could be addressed prior to independent living.<sup>146</sup>

An [evaluation](#) of a two-year HF pilot in Scotland for care-leavers aged 16-25 in 2020 found 11 of the 12 young people maintained their tenancies over the pilot period.<sup>147</sup>

In 2018, the UK Government said it did not have plans to pilot HF specifically for under-25s.<sup>148</sup>

#### Women

The [Y-Foundation](#), representing several HF stakeholders in Finland, stated that “women’s homelessness has not decreased even though

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<sup>140</sup> Crisis, [Ending rough sleeping: what works? An international evidence review](#), 2017, p35

<sup>141</sup> N. Pleace, [HF guide: Europe](#), 2016, p21

<sup>142</sup> S. Kertesz et al, [HF for persons with active addiction: Are we overreaching?](#), The Milbank Quarterly, 87, 2009, pp495-534; Volker Busch-Geertsema, [Housing First Europe Final Report](#), 2013, chapter 3.6

<sup>143</sup> HF England, [The picture of HF in England](#), 2020, p5

<sup>144</sup> HF England, [HF in England: The principles](#), undated, p2

<sup>145</sup> C. Collins et al, [Implementing HF with families and young adults: Challenges and progress toward self-sufficiency](#), Children and Youth Service Review, 96, 2019

<sup>146</sup> S. Gaetz, [Can HF work for youth?](#), European Journal of Homelessness, 8, 2014 p163

<sup>147</sup> Rock Trust, [HF for Youth Pilot: Evaluation report](#), July 2020

<sup>148</sup> PQ 176253 [[HF: Young people](#)], 16 October 2018

homelessness and long-term homelessness in general have” under Finland’s HF schemes. It argued that more specific work with women who become homeless is needed, especially to protect them from abuse and to support those whose children may be taken into custody.<sup>149</sup>

Homeless Link has published [evaluations and guidance](#) relating to HF services for women. This includes a [two-year evaluation of Threshold Housing Project’s Housing First pilot](#) for women with an offending history. This identified that most women using the service had experienced some form of domestic abuse. By June 2017, of the 20 women in tenancies, 16 were still in tenancies.<sup>150</sup> The [evaluation](#) argued that further research is needed on “exploring variants of the Housing First model which are specifically focused on homeless women with complex needs”.<sup>151</sup>

An [evaluation of HF schemes in Canada](#) working with chronically homeless women also found successful outcomes.<sup>152</sup>

## 6.4 Does HF help non-housing needs?

Below is a short summary of research on the impact of HF on the non-housing needs of service users. This includes its impact on drug and alcohol misuse, health, social isolation and interaction with the criminal justice system.

In 2013, the academics Nicholas Pleace and Deborah Quilgars, in their [assessment of the international evidence base](#), concluded that amongst the potential impacts of HF on health, employment and social inclusion, “the most consistent evidence points to the stabilisation of both mental health and drug and alcohol issues” in HF programmes which are “at least as good as Treatment First approaches”.<sup>153</sup>

Homeless Link’s 2015 [literature review](#) found, on the whole, that participants in HF projects experienced an improvement, or at least stabilisation, in substance misuse, health, and social inclusion, although the evidence base was not strong.<sup>154</sup>

In 2017, an [international evidence review](#) for Crisis examined the impacts of HF on non-housing needs. On health, this study found mixed and neutral evidence on HF’s impact.<sup>155</sup> It argued that, “on balance”, HF “may be equally and is sometimes more effective than TF [Treatment First] in reducing levels of substance misuse”.<sup>156</sup> A [literature review in](#)

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<sup>149</sup> Y Foundation, [A home of your own: HF and ending homelessness in Finland](#), 2018, p94

<sup>150</sup> D. Quilgars and N. Pleace, [The Threshold HF Pilot: Women with an offending history](#), 2017, pv

<sup>151</sup> [Ibid](#), pvii

<sup>152</sup> A. Oudshoorn et al, [An evaluation of a HF programme for chronically homeless women](#), Journal of Social Inclusion, 2018, p3

<sup>153</sup> N. Pleace and D. Quilgars [Improving Health and Social Integration through Housing First: A Review](#), 2013

<sup>154</sup> Homeless Link, [‘Housing First’ or ‘Housing Led’? The current picture of Housing First in England](#), 2015, pp8-9.

<sup>155</sup> Crisis, [Ending rough sleeping: What works? An international evidence review](#), 2017, p39

<sup>156</sup> [Ibid](#), p41

[2019](#) concluded that HF “may improve some aspects of health” but its long term health outcomes require further investigation.<sup>157</sup>

The 2017 review for Crisis reported that “criminal activity largely declines with HF”.<sup>158</sup> It cited a 2015 [University of York study](#) that found across nine pilots in England, of the “60 service users supplying outcomes data, 78% reported involvement in anti-social behaviour a year prior to using Housing First, compared to 53% when asked about current behaviour”.<sup>159</sup>

It is argued that HF can have a negative impact on other outcomes.

This includes rent. Some HF programmes (such as the Pathway Housing First project in New York) have used a mandatory automatic deduction of rent from users’ incomes, which has been [criticised](#) as not in keeping with Housing First’s emphasis on choice.<sup>160</sup> There is also [evidence](#) to suggest that high rents can lead to restricted incomes, and difficulties in sustaining a varied diet or integrating with the local community.<sup>161</sup>

Other [research](#) has highlighted the use of scattered-site accommodation for HF schemes as having potential to lead to greater social isolation, rather than less.<sup>162</sup>

A collection and assessment of studies on the impact of accommodation-based services, including HF, can be found in a report for the [Centre for Homelessness Impact](#) (2020).<sup>163</sup>

## 6.5 What are the challenges in delivering HF?

This section has a non-exhaustive list of challenges raised regarding the implementation of HF programmes, primarily in a UK context.

### **Need to work within other homelessness strategies and with other services**

Proponents of HF, both within Governments and third-sector organisations, argue that HF is only one of the schemes necessary to reduce homelessness, requiring integration with other services and efficient identification of the groups to be targeted specifically by HF.

The University of York academic, Nicolas Pleace’s, [Using HF](#) (2018) said HF cannot be treated as an isolated solution:

Housing First is highly effective in ending homelessness among people with high and complex needs, but it does not constitute a solution to single homelessness, or rough sleeping, in itself. The

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<sup>157</sup> A. Baxter et al, [Effects of HF approaches on health and well-being of adults who are homeless or at risk of homelessness: Systematic review and meta-analysis of randomised controlled trials](#), Journal of Epidemiology & Community Health, 73, 2019

<sup>158</sup> [Ibid](#), p43

<sup>159</sup> J. Bretherton and N. Pleace, [Evaluating HF in England: An evaluation of nine services](#), 2015, p5

<sup>160</sup> G. Johnson, S. and C. Parsell, [Policy shift or programme drift? Implementing Housing First in Australia](#), Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, 2012

<sup>161</sup> J. Bretherton and N. Pleace, [HF in England: An Evaluation of Nine Services](#), February 2015, p36

<sup>162</sup> Volker Busch-Geertsema, [Housing First Europe Final Report](#), 2013, p69

<sup>163</sup> Campbell UK & Ireland and Queen’s University Belfast, [Accommodation-based programmes for individuals experiencing or at risk of homelessness](#), October 2020

international evidence shows that Housing First services need to be a part of an integrated homelessness strategy to be truly effective. An integrated homelessness strategy, characterised by extensive interagency working, uses preventative services and a range of homelessness services (of which Housing First services are one group) to effectively meet the diverse needs of single homeless people. Integrated strategies, incorporating Housing First within a mix of service types, have reduced homelessness to very low levels in Denmark, Finland and Norway.<sup>164</sup>

The head of national practice at Homeless Link, Jo Prestidge, has stressed HF cannot “be seen as the last resort for people whom all other services have failed, but as an option that should be available for those that need it”.<sup>165</sup>

### Funding

HF schemes in the UK are primarily reliant on a collection of local and national government funding schemes, which are often provided on a short-term basis. This can limit planning and service sustainability.<sup>166</sup>

HF England’s [The picture of HF in England](#) (2020) found that funding for many services was short-term and argued “this continues to pose a challenge to an approach that commits to providing an open-ended offer of support for residents”. It found that 40% of providers had funding for 1 year and 43% 2-3 years (providers may have more than one funding arrangement).<sup>167</sup>

An [earlier report](#), in 2018, by the same organisation, said pooled budgets from health, criminal justice and local government could be used to sustain HF given its potential cost savings to other services.<sup>168</sup>

The [Centre for Social Justice](#) in 2021 similarly cited the “impact of wider budgetary constraints on the scope to expand Housing First”. This included spending reductions in addiction services, mental health services, adult social care budgets and youth services as “contribut[ing] to an environment which local authority commissioners may seek to dilute the principles of Housing First in order to stretch limited resources further”.<sup>169</sup>

### Access to accommodation and the housing register

HF England’s [Picture of HF in England](#) (2020) states “by far the most commonly mentioned challenges were accessing suitable accommodation and the uncertain funding situation”. These were cited by 33 and 17 respondents, respectively (out of a total of 64).<sup>170</sup>

[Crisis](#) has argued that in England it is necessary to revise allocations guidance to ensure people are not excluded from registering for social housing, such as on the basis of affordability tests and the lower rate of

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<sup>164</sup> Nicholas Pleace, [Using Housing First in Integrated Homelessness Strategies: A Review of the Evidence](#) 2018, p.iii

<sup>165</sup> Homeless Link Blog, [HF is unique- let’s do it right](#), 3 October 2017

<sup>166</sup> Joanne Bretherton and Nicholas Pleace, [Housing First in England: An Evaluation of Nine Services](#), Centre for Housing Policy, February 2015, pp6, 69

<sup>167</sup> HF England, [The picture of HF in England 2020: Key findings](#), 2020, p3

<sup>168</sup> HF England, [Investigating the current and future funding of HF in England](#), 2018

<sup>169</sup> Centre for Social Justice, [Close to home](#), 2021, p81

<sup>170</sup> HF England, [The picture of HF in England 2020](#), p7



benefit due to the Shared Accommodation Rate (SAR). As previously noted, Crisis recommend an exemption from SAR for those moving into HF so support can be offered in their own home.<sup>171</sup>

Housing First England [reported in 2015](#) that HF schemes had to work with local authorities to change local allocation policies to gain access to social housing for HF purposes.<sup>172</sup>

## 6.6 Does HF save money?

HF has been found to have potential to reduce costs, or ensure more efficient spending, by reducing the number of interactions a homeless person has with public services.<sup>173</sup>

Several assumptions may have been made in the studies referred to below, including the amount of time public services must spend engaging with users, the type of services they engage with, and a decreasing engagement over time with HF support services.<sup>174</sup>

A [2013 study](#) examined five European projects and concluded that whilst there were indications that three would have been more expensive if temporary accommodation had been provided instead, the authors concluded there was lack of robust evidence on which to assess the cost impact of HF. For example, they cited uncertainty on how long support is required for users of HF services.<sup>175</sup>

The studies referred to below include comment on the cost effectiveness of HF in the UK:

- The 2016 evaluation of the [Belfast HF](#) provided by Depaul found the level of funding was “not disproportionate to the risks involved in piloting the service” but for 2014/15 the costs per user per week were more expensive for some of the floating services intended for the client group.<sup>176</sup> Costs were expected to fall in later years.<sup>177</sup>
- Based on the 2016/17 [Liverpool City Region pilot](#), [Crisis](#) estimated that “the Housing First model could be around three to five times more cost effective than current provision” for the cohort.<sup>178</sup>
- A 2017 [report for Social Bite](#) in **Scotland** by Heriot-Watt University estimated that net cost (following savings to other public institutions) would be £1 million in year one. Year two

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<sup>171</sup> Crisis, [Everybody in: How to end homelessness in Great Britain](#), 2018?, p226

<sup>172</sup> HF England, [HF report 2017](#), p17

<sup>173</sup> N. Pleace and D. Quilgars, [Improving Health and Social Integration through Housing First | A Review](#), 2013, p53

<sup>174</sup> Nicholas Pleace, [Using Housing First in Integrated Homelessness Strategies: A Review of the Evidence](#), University of York, 2018, pp32-4; N. Pleace and D. Quilgars, [Improving health and social integration through housing first. A review](#), 2013, p54; N. Pleace and J. Bretherton, [Housing First in England, An Evaluation of Nine Services](#), 2015, p52

<sup>175</sup> Volker Busch-Geertsema et al, [Housing First Europe: Final Report](#), 2013, p9

<sup>176</sup> North Harbour Consulting, [The efficiency and effectiveness of HF support service piloted by Depaul in Belfast](#), October 2016, p10

<sup>177</sup> North Harbour Consulting, [The efficiency and effectiveness of HF support service piloted by Depaul in Belfast](#), October 2016, pp7, 54, 55, 95

<sup>178</sup> Crisis, [HF feasibility study for the Liverpool City Region](#), 2017, p16

would have a net cost of £1.96 million. They predicted overall net savings to Government spending in future years but did not include one-off administrative costs or ongoing costs due to the inflow of new cases.<sup>179</sup>

- In 2019, a [report for HF England](#), based on fifteen HF services estimated that HF was, on average, more expensive in the first year, at £4,123 compared to £2,988 in year three.<sup>180</sup> The authors said it “might” cost less than other approaches in terms of support services but HF may be “better characterised as something that is cost effective [...] because it stops long-term and recurrent homelessness”. They also noted HF is a “young model” and it “is not known what sort of contact rates might exist at three or five years”.<sup>181</sup>
- **The Local Government Association** in its [Lessons learnt from councils' response to rough sleeping during the COVID-19 pandemic](#) (2020) heard from local partnerships and others that “there is also some evidence that housing first placements are proving more expensive than anticipated in some areas, because the length of time for which support needs to be continued is longer than was first thought”.<sup>182</sup>
- **The Centre for Social Justice** in [Close to Home](#) (2021) estimated that the “reduction in public service costs typically generated by Housing First more than offsets the costs of providing Housing First”. It estimated that “where an estimated £9,683 is spent annually on average per Housing First client, £15,073 is saved on other bills including homelessness services, the criminal justice system, NHS and mental health services, as well as drug and alcohol support”.<sup>183</sup>

Local pilots in the UK also suggested that HF services were cheaper on a weekly basis when compared to a hostel ([Camden First](#), 2012-13),<sup>184</sup> and that users may spend less time in prisons, hospitals and community mental health teams ([Manchester](#), 2014-17).<sup>185</sup>

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<sup>179</sup> Mandy Littlewood, Glen Bramley, Suzanne Fitzpatrick, Jenny Wood, [Eradicating 'Core Homelessness' in Scotland's Four Largest Cities: Providing an Evidence Base and Guiding a Funding Framework](#), I-Sphere/Heriott Watt University, October 2017

<sup>180</sup> N. Pleace and J. Bretherton, [The cost effectiveness of HF in England](#), 2019, p35

<sup>181</sup> [Ibid](#), p5

<sup>182</sup> LGA, [Lessons learnt from councils' response to rough sleeping during the COVID-19 pandemic](#), 2020

<sup>183</sup> Centre for Social Justice, [Close to home: Delivering a national HF programme](#), February 2021, p10

<sup>184</sup> Nicholas Pleace and Joanne Bretherton, [Camden Housing First: A Housing First Experiment in London](#), 2013, p58

<sup>185</sup> Sarah Barnes and Stephen Bray, [Inspiring Change Manchester: Housing First](#), 2017, chs. 3 and p10

## 6.7 What criticisms are made of other models?

As previously noted, HF is often contrasted with “stairway” or “linear” models of homeless support and those that emphasise “treatment first”. This section cites some arguments made against these approaches. Note these studies often compare models of service delivery and may not apply to services as delivered in the UK.

### Stairway model

Criticisms often focus on the lack of choice offered and argue the stairway model “manages” rather than resolves, homelessness.<sup>186</sup> These include (examples of research are cited in footnotes):

1. Stress and dislocation caused by frequent moves.<sup>187</sup>
2. Lack of service-user choice.<sup>188</sup>
3. Lack of privacy especially at “lower” stages.
4. Skills learnt to function in a structured setting are not necessarily transferable to independent living situations.<sup>189</sup>
5. Length of time to move into independent housing.
6. Difficulties in accessing, navigating, and staying connected to, support and health services.<sup>190</sup>
7. High attrition rates as individuals fall back or become entrenched in the system, especially if conditions are applied rigidly (e.g. requirements to abstain from alcohol or drugs).<sup>191</sup>

Researchers have attributed poor outcomes to the stairway model. The York University academic, Nicolas Pleace, [argued in 2018](#) that traditional approaches to homelessness can result in:

- Abandonment of services by homeless people with complex needs.
- Eviction from services for non-compliance with rules.
- People becoming ‘stuck’ in services because the requirements to be assessed as ‘housing ready’ cannot be attained within a reasonable timeframe.
- Low rates of exits from homelessness being achieved [...]

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<sup>186</sup> For example, V. Busch-Geertsema, [HF Europe: Final report](#), 2013, p16

<sup>187</sup> University of York for the DCLG, [Statutory homelessness in England: The experience of families and 16-17 year olds](#), 2008, pp33-4

<sup>188</sup> B. O’Shaughnessy, [Autonomy and authority: Homeless service user’s empowering experiences in HF and staircase services](#), Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology, 2021; R. Greenwood et al, [Homeless adults’ recovery experiences in HF and traditional services programmes in seven European countries](#), American Journal of Community Psychology, 65, 2019

<sup>189</sup> C. M. Nicholls, [Housing, homelessness and capabilities](#), *Housing, Theory and Society*, 27, 2010

<sup>190</sup> Centre for Social Justice, [HF: Housing-led solutions to rough sleeping and homelessness](#), 2017, p38

<sup>191</sup> Crisis, [Staircases, elevators and cycles of change](#), 2010, p5; I. Sahlin, [The staircase of transition](#), *Innovation: The European Journal of Social Science Research*, 18, 2005

- Individuals moving between services repeatedly without their homelessness ever being resolved; caught in a revolving door of service use which, as well as representing a failure to resolve homelessness, can also be financially expensive.<sup>192</sup>

### “Treatment First” model

The “treatment first” approach has also attracted criticism:

- **Support workers concentrate too much on long-term conditions** and neglect the goal of avoiding rough sleeping.<sup>193</sup>
- **People with complex needs find it difficult to navigate the various support agencies** (e.g. NHS, social services).<sup>194</sup> The Centre for Social Justice argues that “funding and commissioning structures do not facilitate the provision of multi-agency coordinated care and support services.”<sup>195</sup>
- Users with high needs have often had traumatic experiences which can lead to a **distrust of conventional services**.<sup>196</sup>
- Accommodation-based services (e.g. hostels) will contain people with many different needs: conflict and behavioural difficulties can emerge in these environments.<sup>197</sup> These services can struggle to handle people with multiple needs: Homeless Link found in 2017 that in 42% of the cases where a homeless person was refused accommodation services, one reason cited was that their needs were too complex.<sup>198</sup>

As stated above, proponents of HF acknowledge that it needs to be part of a homelessness strategy which includes multiple approaches.

## 6.8 Finding out more

Both [Housing First Europe Hub](#) and [Housing First England](#) maintain lists of further reports, research and evaluations.

HF Europe has [published a guide](#) on the principles of HF.

As of June 2020, 13 OECD countries report HF strategies at a national level: Canada, Chile, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France, Ireland, Japan, Luxembourg, Norway, New Zealand, Portugal and the United States.

The OECD has published a short summary of the programmes as [HC.3.2. National strategies for combatting homelessness](#) (June 2020) and HF Europe [provides policy guides for European nations](#).

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<sup>192</sup> Nicholas Pleace, [Using Housing First in Integrated Homelessness Strategies: A Review of the Evidence](#), University of York, 2018, p.12

<sup>193</sup> Benjamin F. Henwood, Victoria Stanhope and Deborah K. Padgett, [The Role of Housing: A Comparison of Front-Line Provider Views in Housing First and Traditional Programmes](#), *Adm Policy Ment Health*, 38, pp77-85.

<sup>194</sup> Homeless Link, [Support for single homeless people in England Annual Review 2017](#), 2018, pp29-31

<sup>195</sup> Centre for Social Justice, [Housing First](#), 2017, p38

<sup>196</sup> Sarah Johnsen, [Blog: Why does Housing First work?](#) Scottish Housing News, 21 March 2018

<sup>197</sup> Shelter, [Good practice briefing: Housing first](#), December 2008

<sup>198</sup> Homeless Link, [Support for single homeless people in England: Annual Review 2017](#), March 2018, p31

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