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# Scotland's Housing First Pathfinder Evaluation

## First Interim Report

Sarah Johnsen, Janice Blenkinsopp and Matthew Rayment



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## List of Abbreviations

ASB	Anti-Social Behaviour
CBA	Cost Benefit Analysis
CCG	Community Care Grant
CPN	Community Psychiatric Nurse
GP	General Practitioner
HA	Housing Association
HF	Housing First
HNS	Homeless Network Scotland
HARSAG	Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Action Group
HSCP	Health and Social Care Partnership
LA	Local Authority
NDT	New Directions Team (Assessment)
PRS	Private Rented Sector
RRTP	Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan
RSL	Registered Social Landlord
SA	Salvation Army
SSST	Short Scottish Secure Tenancy
SST	Scottish Secure Tenancy
SWF	Scottish Welfare Fund
TPS	Turning Point Scotland

# Executive Summary

## Background and evaluation methods

This interim report documents initial findings from an independent evaluation of Scotland's Housing First Pathfinder. The Pathfinder is serving as a key litmus test regarding the opportunities and challenges involved in scaling up Housing First as it increasingly becomes the default response for homeless people with complex needs across Scotland<sup>1</sup>. This report documents key achievements, challenges, and lessons learned during the design, mobilisation, and early implementation phases of the programme.

The Pathfinder set out to scale up Housing First delivery in five areas across Scotland, encompassing six local authorities, including: Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire, Dundee, Edinburgh, Glasgow, and Stirling. It began supporting people in late 2018 (initially in Glasgow, followed by the other areas), was formally launched in April 2019, and will run until March 2022.

The Pathfinder has been funded by the Scottish Government (up to £6.5m), Social Bite (c.£2m) and Merchants House of Glasgow (c.£200k). Corra Foundation and Homeless Network Scotland were appointed fund and project managers, respectively. Turning Point Scotland was commissioned to provide training in Housing First principles and practice for Pathfinder providers and partners. In the final year of the programme (2021-2022) Corra Foundation will manage the distribution of up to £2.5m transition funding on behalf of the Scottish Government which is designed to support up to half of the full cost of the Pathfinder programme as the process of mainstreaming Housing First in the five areas is implemented.

The independent evaluation of the Pathfinder programme is being conducted by the Institute for Social Policy, Housing and Equalities Research (I-SPHERE) at Heriot-Watt University in collaboration with ICF. It was commissioned by Corra Foundation with funding from Social Bite. The evaluation design combines an *outcomes* evaluation which will document individual-level outcomes for the people supported across a wide range of areas, a *process* evaluation assessing fidelity to the core principles of Housing First and investigating factors that have facilitated or inhibited delivery, and a *cost-benefit analysis* evaluating whether the Pathfinders have delivered value for money.

These three threads of the evaluation are at different stages of completion given the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and associated restrictions. Data collection for the outcomes evaluation and cost-benefit analysis in particular have been severely delayed. This interim report therefore focuses in the main on the process thread of the evaluation, but nevertheless takes the opportunity to report on basic tenancy sustainment rates and provide an early indication as regards the cost of Housing First delivery. The full range of individual-level outcomes and cost-benefits will be reported in future evaluation outputs.

Four key data sources are drawn upon in this report. The first was data collected during the first (of two) waves of process evaluation interviews, including interviews with a total of 22 Pathfinder leads and consortia partner representatives working in managerial positions, 34 frontline support workers, 17 representatives of external stakeholder agencies (including local authorities, health and criminal justice sectors, amongst others), 29 individuals being supported by the Pathfinders, and three national-level stakeholders. The second source was a subsequent set of interviews with a total of six senior representatives of the Pathfinders focussing explicitly on the impacts of and Pathfinder responses to the COVID-19 pandemic. The third data source comprised 'tracker' monitoring data

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<sup>1</sup> Scottish Government (2021) *Housing to 2040*. Scottish Government, Edinburgh.

collected from Pathfinders by Homeless Network Scotland on a monthly basis. The fourth data source included financial returns, submitted to Corra Foundation by the Pathfinders on a quarterly basis.

### Pathfinder characteristics and programme fidelity

All five Pathfinders target the population traditionally supported by Housing First programmes, that being homeless people with multiple and complex needs who have often experienced long-term or repeat homelessness. Some also include an element targeting young people via Housing First for Youth ('HF4Y'). The vast majority (98%) of all properties allocated to date have been in the social rented sector. The size and structure of Pathfinder consortia vary substantially, however, especially as regards the number of partners and/or degree of involvement of statutory bodies, as noted in Table 1 below. The contexts and systems within which the Pathfinders operate also differ markedly, as has the level of ambition regarding target number of tenancies. Together, these variations have afforded valuable opportunity to reflect on shared and locality-specific challenges and responses in the delivery of Housing First at scale.

**Table 1: Pathfinder overview**

	<b>Aberdeen/shire</b>	<b>Dundee</b>	<b>Edinburgh</b>	<b>Glasgow</b>	<b>Stirling</b>
<i>Consortia composition</i>	Led by Aberdeen Cyrenians in partnership with Aberdeen Foyer, Turning Point Scotland, Aberdeen City Council, and Aberdeenshire Council	Led by Transform Community Development, in partnership with The Salvation Army, DSG (Dundee Survival Group), We Are With You (formerly Addaction)	Led by Edinburgh Cyrenians in partnership with Turning Point Scotland, Rock Trust, Streetwork, Bethany, Gowrie Care (now Hillcrest Futures), and Barony (now Wheatley Care)	Led by Turning Point Scotland in partnership with Simon Community Scotland, Salvation Army, and Loretto Care (now Wheatley Care)	Partnership between Loretto Care and Barony (which subsequently merged into Wheatley Care)
<i>Target group / eligibility</i>	Initially rough sleepers, then those in temporary accommodation who have experienced cyclical homelessness	Experience of multiple and complex needs, repeat homelessness, and willingness to engage with HF support	Experience of multiple and complex needs and been in homelessness system for many years	Experience of complex needs, over 18, and statutorily homeless	Experience of multiple and complex needs and repeat episodes of homelessness
<i>Referral</i>	Open, including self-referral. NDT used to assess eligibility and prioritise referrals	Open, including self-referral. Use of screening tool to assess eligibility	Mostly from council homelessness officers but other agencies do refer. NDT used to prioritise referrals	Open, referrals processed via consortium staff using HSCP processes after taking over the role from the HSCP	Referrer completes NDT. Case initially discussed with HF team, then assessed by referral panel.
<i>Type of housing</i>	All sectors, including council, RSL and (small amount	All social (predominantly council); all scatter-site (but	All social (predominantly RSL), accessed via EdIndex CBL	Vast majority social (all of which RSL) with small minority	All social (predominantly RSL); scatter-site

	of) PRS; all scatter-site	plans to trial (congregate)	system; all scatter-site	PRS; all scatter-site	
<i>Tenancy type</i>	SST in social housing; Private Residential Tenancy in PRS	Mostly SST; SSSTs used with one HA	SST	SSTs in HA; Private Residential Tenancy in PRS	SST
<i>Intended staff:client ratio</i>	1:7	1:7	1:7	1:7	1:7
<i>Staff and out of hours coverage</i>	9-5 Monday to Friday (with some flexibility outside this); out of hours support throughout Pathfinder available from Aberdeen Cyrenians and Aberdeen Foyer	8:30am-5:30pm (with some flexibility evenings/weekends); helpline outside office hours	Office hours vary; all but one partner offers out of hours support	Staff shifts cover Monday to Saturday (9am-5pm and 11.30am-7.30pm), and 10-6 on Sundays; out of hours on call support provided	Staff work regular daytime shifts; out of hours support is available from staff in the residential centre within which the team is located
<i>Furnishing/personal budget</i>	Yes, c.£1,200.	Yes, £1,280	Yes, £1,500	Yes, £1,500	No, furnishing package provided
<i>Tenancy target</i>	120	100	275	315	20

Almost all Pathfinders have succeeded in operationalising the majority, if not all, of the seven core principles of Housing First to either a high or high/medium degree. Some deviations are however evident. Where they have occurred, departures from these principles have resulted from either: a) deviations in programme design (e.g. requirements that service users exhibit commitment to engaging with Housing First support, as has been the case in Dundee); or b) the effects of (external or internal) factors which have inhibited Pathfinders' ability to deliver the service in the way intended (e.g. the 'bypassing' of Housing First clients by RSLs experienced in Edinburgh (see below), and restricted capacity of frontline workers to deliver sufficiently flexible support due to staff shortages experienced in Glasgow).

Also affecting fidelity, the absence of certainty regarding the continuation of funding after the transition period has meant that none of the Pathfinders has been able to give service users total assurance regarding the open-endedness of support. Furthermore, it was clear that where caseloads have (in all cases unintentionally) exceeded the intended maximum of seven clients per staff member, staff have been unable to commit the time required to operationalise a number of other principles, such as the use of active engagement approaches, supporting service users to identify their strengths and meet their goals and aspirations, and promotion of harm reduction.

### Number of people housed and tenancy sustainment

Scotland's Housing First Pathfinder has successfully scaled up Housing First provision such that 531 individuals with multiple and complex needs had been allocated a tenancy by the end of June 2021. At the time of writing, two thirds (67%) of the individuals housed were men and one third (32%) women, with less than 1% identifying as transgender. In terms of age profile, 12% were aged 25 and under, 69% 26-49 years, 18% 50-64 years, and less than 1% 65 years or older. Almost all (99%) were White British and the vast majority (96%) identified as heterosexual.

The Pathfinders have been highly effective at supporting people to sustain their tenancies to date, achieving an overall 12-month tenancy sustainment rate of 84% and 24-month tenancy sustainment rate of 82%<sup>2</sup>. The tenancy sustainment rates were relatively consistent across the Pathfinders, the smallest (Stirling, which has housed 13 people to date) excepted. Notably, no evictions have been recorded to date<sup>3</sup>. These tenancy sustainment levels are commensurate with those reported internationally, despite the Pathfinders having operated in the context of a global pandemic for more than a year.

A total of 7% of tenancies might be regarded as having ‘failed’, the reasons and outcomes for which were recorded as: planned moves to temporary homeless accommodation (4% of all tenants), planned move to supported accommodation (2%), and abandonment (2%). Tenancies had ended for a very small minority (2%) of all Pathfinder tenants due to a long-term prison sentence. A total of 6% of individuals housed had subsequently passed away, with these very sad losses occurring in the context of what has been widely acknowledged as a ‘drugs death crisis’ in Scotland, where the current drug-related death rate is the highest in Europe and more than three and a half times greater than that of the UK as a whole<sup>4</sup>.

An extremely small minority (1% of the total number of people housed) had moved into a second Housing First tenancy after the first tenancy had not worked successfully for them.

### Initial service user experiences

Service user interviewees’ experiences of the Pathfinders had been extremely positive on balance. Levels of satisfaction with support and housing were generally very high, albeit that a small minority of interviewees (almost all of whom were being supported by Pathfinders with higher than intended staff caseloads) felt that they would benefit from a greater level of support.

Efforts to reduce waiting times for housing would also be welcomed in some areas given the demoralising effect of lengthy delays for some individuals (see also below). That said, whilst there is a shared ambition amongst stakeholders to increase the speed of property allocations going forward, reducing waiting times may be extremely difficult in some cases given that in exercising user choice some individuals actively prioritise location (e.g. proximity to family or amenities) or specific property attributes (e.g. multi-storey level, age of building, or access to garden) over the likely time taken to obtain a housing offer.

Service user interviewees noted that the relationality, stickability, flexibility and longevity of Housing First support set it apart from other services that they had used in the past and had been pivotal to its effectiveness for them personally. These service attributes had facilitated levels of engagement with support, aided tenancy sustainment, and fostered recovery from addiction and poor mental health.

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<sup>2</sup> Tenancy sustainment rates were calculated by dividing the number of individuals who were still housed in a Pathfinder Housing First tenancy (even if this was not their first such tenancy) by the total number of individuals who were housed that length of time ago (excluding those who were deceased). The number of deaths, and repeat Housing First tenancies, are reported separately.

<sup>3</sup> Pandemic-related restrictions (of varying degrees) had been imposed on social and private landlords’ ability to evict tenants during much of the evaluation period to date, but it should be noted that evictions caused by antisocial behaviour or criminal activity continued to be permitted.

<sup>4</sup> National Records of Scotland (2021) *Drug-related Deaths in Scotland in 2020*. NRS, Edinburgh.

A number of positive impacts on service user interviewees' lives were described, including the resolution of long-term or repeat episodes of homelessness, improved physical health, improved mental health, and reductions in substance misuse/dependency. For some, the effects were described as transformational.

## Challenges and lessons learned

### Project design, early implementation and multi-agency working

Several key lessons have been learned as regards the design and early implementation of Housing First programmes. Crucially, time spent developing partnerships with key stakeholders across all relevant sectors (most notably housing providers, but also those in health and social care, and criminal justice), is time well invested. Further to this, attempts to foster buy-in from stakeholders should ideally target individuals in frontline roles (e.g. housing officers) as well as those operating at a strategic level. Ideally, clarity should be established between all stakeholders regarding their respective roles and responsibilities from the outset, albeit in practice at least some degree of learning will occur and modification to protocols be required subsequently.

Regarding target group and service eligibility, early learning from the Pathfinder (which parallels the experiences of concurrent pilots in England<sup>5</sup>) indicates that Housing First is not suitable for three particular groups: firstly, people who lack capacity to comprehend a standard tenancy agreement and/or the consequences of failing to adhere to its conditions (due to severe learning difficulties or alcohol related brain damage, for example); secondly, those who are so unwell that their healthcare needs exceed what can realistically be provided by Housing First; and thirdly, people who do not want Housing First. Alternative 24/7 intensive support interventions are needed for the first two of these groups given that they require a care-led rather than housing-led solution<sup>6</sup>. Further thinking and evidence is required to identify the most appropriate intervention(s) for the third group. The same is true for the minority of individuals who have not been able to sustain tenancies even with Housing First support.

Key lessons regarding referral processes have included the importance of ensuring that eligibility criteria are clear and communicated effectively to referral agents, that potential clients should be informed of and consent to their referral to Housing First, and that a tool such as the New Directions Team (NDT) assessment, whilst imperfect, is helpful in prioritising referrals. Further to this, there is clear value in having multi-agency input into referral assessments, but support providers should always be involved in decisions regarding whether Housing First might be suitable for any individual referred. This is especially critical where there is clear disparity in levels of 'risk appetite' amongst key stakeholders and/or statutory bodies face particular (sometimes context-specific) challenges in meeting their statutory obligations toward very vulnerable individuals.

Pathfinders' success in brokering access to other services, especially in the field of mental health, was variable. Dissonance between the flexible approach to support delivery endorsed by Housing First and the comparatively inflexible statutory systems it works in conjunction with remains a perennial problem. The need for collaborative problem-solving in any attempt to resolve these

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<sup>5</sup> MHCLG (2021) *Evaluation of the Housing First Pilots: second process evaluation report*. MHCLG, London.

<sup>6</sup> Reid, B. (2021) *Preventing Homelessness in Scotland. Recommendations for legal duties to prevent homelessness: A report from the Prevention Review Group*. Homelessness Prevention Review Group, Edinburgh.

issues was widely recognised and allied with a broader call for cross-sector systems change<sup>7</sup>. The fact that a number of barriers (to essential healthcare, for example) had been removed during the pandemic has given some grounds for optimism regarding the possibility of positive change going forward in this area.

### Sourcing and furnishing homes

A key challenge across all Pathfinder areas has been sourcing the required number of suitable one-bedroom properties in areas that the people being supported want to live. This has contributed to long delays in allocating homes to some service users, with the average length of time between an individual being recruited to a Pathfinder and moving into a tenancy being 172 days<sup>8</sup>. This problem was especially acute in the highest pressure housing markets (most notably Edinburgh), and compounded by the hiatus in property allocations during the pandemic across all Pathfinders.

The experiences of the Pathfinders to date indicate that Housing First providers face a particular challenge in balancing: a) maximisation of user choice with regard to housing location/type; with b) minimisation of risk of harm (to both Housing First tenants and their neighbours); and c) time taken to source housing. A key task for frontline workers is to support service users to make informed choices regarding housing (and indeed other aspects of their lives), such that they are aware of the full range of options available to them and are supported to assess the potential benefits, limitations, and risks associated with each.

Levels of RSL understanding of and buy-in to Housing First were reported to be widely variable. The Pathfinders had benefited from very strong support from a number, and levels of interest and commitment amongst others were said to be increasing as the effectiveness of the approach with individuals previously deemed 'unhousable' was becoming increasingly evident locally. Private rented sector use has been very limited given concerns about affordability, albeit that greater use has not been ruled out in some areas (notably Dundee) given its potential to increase service users' access to housing in city centre locations.

The question of whether Housing First clients should be allocated housing within or outwith mainstream allocation processes has been a subject of extensive debate in some areas. Those who support the use of mainstream processes do so on grounds of transparency and the preservation of fairness to other applicants. Challenges encountered in Edinburgh however indicate that the use of mainstream choice-based lettings systems can have unintended negative consequences such as the geographic concentration of and competition amongst Housing First clients. Further to this, the experiences of the Edinburgh Pathfinder indicate that there is a risk that some landlords may 'bypass' Housing First clients on common housing registers given their concerns regarding the risks such tenants might pose and/or limited awareness of the support available to Housing First clients.

Delays accessing furniture resulting, in large part, from issues associated with Scottish Welfare Fund (SWF) applications had been a significant source of frustration in some areas. This has been very problematic given the negative affect that moving into minimally or unfurnished tenancies had had on some residents' moods and motivation, and an elevated risk of potential abandonment. There was a strong call for SWF grant application processes to be made more efficient and/or for consideration to be given to the adoption of a 'grace period' of up to two weeks, potentially covered

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<sup>7</sup> Bramley, G., Fitzpatrick, S., Wood, J., Sosenko, F., Blenkinsopp, J., Littlewood, M., Frew, C., Bashar, T., McIntyre, J. and Johnsen, S. (2019) *Hard Edges Scotland: new conversations about severe and multiple disadvantage*. Lankelly Chase and The Robertson Trust, London.

<sup>8</sup> As at the end of June 2021.

by a Two Homes Payment, enabling Housing First tenants to furnish and move into their homes without any risk of them having to occupy an unfurnished property.

Personalisation budgets allowing tenants to exercise choice when furnishing their homes had been very positively received by service user interviewees. Staff members involved in the administration of these budgets nevertheless called for further consideration and clarification regarding whether at least some of this (or additional) funding might be devoted to other things which may feasibly foster tenancy sustainment, combat social isolation, promote community integration, and/or support service users' pursuit of other goals and aspirations (e.g. gym membership, games consoles, TV packages, communication technology etc.).

That said, given the challenge involved in balancing the maximisation of user choice with regard to furnishings and minimisation of time taken to furnish properties, further reflection is needed regarding the advantages and disadvantages of offering furniture packages (which offer some albeit restricted choice of type and style) versus the provision of personalisation budgets for furnishing. Some providers are of the view that the use of furniture packages is an acceptable trade-off given the way these expedite the process of setting up new homes.

#### Staff recruitment, training and support delivery

Difficulties recruiting and retaining frontline staff have been encountered in some Pathfinder areas. A key point of learning has been the need to consider parity of salary and conditions where Housing First is delivered by consortia. Broader questions have also been raised regarding the adequacy of pay for Housing First support workers given the skills required and demands of their role. The provision of high quality supervisory support and regular opportunities for reflective practice were widely identified as being of critical importance. Furthermore, provision of clinical supervision opportunities is increasingly being endorsed as good practice given the risk of frontline staff being exposed to vicarious trauma and/or potential burnout<sup>9</sup>.

The training provided by Turning Point Scotland's Housing First Academy Training Hub had been well received by frontline staff and external stakeholder interviewees alike. Demand for additional 'locality-specific' training which not only introduces the key principles of Housing First but also provides an overview of local referral, assessment and allocation processes in different contexts was identified. There was also a clear call for the continuation of a national forum and events akin to the 'Connect' series hosted by Homeless Network Scotland throughout the Pathfinder programme given the opportunities afforded for shared learning and joint working.

The COVID-19 pandemic and associated restrictions has affected Pathfinder delivery in a number of ways, most notably necessitating remote contact with service users when face-to-face engagement was not deemed absolutely essential. A key point of learning during this period has been that remote means of contact are welcomed by some service users but not others given differences in their personal preferences, access to communication technology, and/or confidence in using such technology. This being so, whilst remote contact is likely to be a feature of support delivery to at least some degree going forward, the Pathfinders' early experiences indicate that it should be regarded as a potential complement to rather than substitute for face-to-face contact.

The importance of preserving small caseloads has been a key finding. When staff caseloads have (in all cases unintentionally) exceeded the intended maximum of seven, support workers have been

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<sup>9</sup> Theodorou, N., Johnsen, S., Watts, B. and Burley, A. (2021) Improving multiple exclusion homelessness services: frontline worker responses to insecure attachment styles. *Journal of Mental Health Training, Education and Practice*, ahead of print <https://doi.org/10.1108/JMHTEP-02-2021-0016>.

compelled to: a) focus on crisis resolution for a subset of their clients at the expense of the day-to-day support of others; and in so doing b) prioritise tenancy sustainment to the neglect of support relating to other areas of service users' lives (e.g. mental and physical health, social isolation, community integration etc.). Critically, service user interviewees affected by higher than intended staff caseloads reported feeling insufficiently supported. The initial experiences of providers working in rural areas indicate that a case might be made for even lower caseloads (of 1:5) in rural contexts to take account of travel requirements if rural services are to retain a high degree of fidelity to Housing First principles. Further reflection and ideally cost modelling is needed to identify what might be regarded an 'ideal' caseload going forward, especially as established Housing First services 'mature', given initial indications that at least some Pathfinder tenants' requirements for support have reduced over time.

### Anti-social behaviour and community integration

Incidents of anti-social behaviour wherein Housing First tenants had been either a victim or perpetrator (and in some cases both) had occurred in all Pathfinder areas but had been much less prevalent than had been anticipated by many stakeholders. Some instances had necessitated moving Pathfinder clients into alternative accommodation (see above). Two key factors were deemed to have been effective in preventing and mitigating anti-social behaviour: firstly, rapid response to early signs of an issue developing; and secondly, effective joint working between key stakeholders (especially Housing First support workers and housing officers).

Further thought needs to be given to how Housing First clients might be most effectively protected from 'cuckooing' perpetrated by associates of local and/or long-distance ('county line') drugs networks. The utilisation of intelligence held by relevant stakeholders (e.g. housing officers) regarding particular neighbourhoods may help in mitigating risks associated with the former to at least some extent. On a related point, further reflection regarding the causes of and potential mitigations regarding drug-related deaths would be judicious, especially given the number of deaths of Housing First tenants occurring during the pandemic, at least some of which were attributed by interviewees to changes in local drugs markets.

Endeavours to combat social isolation and foster community integration have been severely impaired by the pandemic, in large part due to social distancing measures and the (temporary) closure of many community facilities. There is widespread acknowledgement amongst stakeholders that this general area represents the 'nut that has not yet been cracked' by the Pathfinders, due in part but not solely to the pandemic, and that further thought and learning is required regarding how best to support Housing First tenants to (re)build positive social support networks and feel part of their local community.

### Expenditure and unit costs

Slightly more than £5million had been spent on Pathfinder delivery (excluding partner costs) by the end of March 2021. Staff costs have accounted for 72% of overall expenditures to date, with implementation capital costs (particularly the cost of furnishing properties) amounting to 10% and running costs (information technology, office costs, training, expenses, including capital and revenue costs) amounting to a combined 14%.

When direct costs to Pathfinders (only) are considered, the average annual unit cost at 2020/21 year end was £10,981 per person housed (and £7,645 per person supported). If key partner costs (covering fund and project management delivered by Corra Foundation and Homeless Network Scotland, and training provided by Turning Point Scotland) are included, the average annual unit cost

at 2020/21 year end was £12,088 per person housed (or £8,415 per person supported). The unit costs recorded have reduced year on year since the Pathfinder programme began. Unit cost comparators for alternative forms of provision will be provided in future evaluation outputs.

## Final reflections

These interim findings indicate that Housing First provision can be successfully scaled up, and relatively quickly so, even in areas where housing supply is constrained. The process of scaling up is more difficult in contexts with large and/or complex systems involving many different stakeholders (as is the case in Glasgow for example); and comparatively easier in smaller centres where fewer relationships need to be developed and/or organisational procedures adapted or integrated.

The location and nature of potential 'sticking points' in attempts to scale up vary depending on factors such as consortium size and configuration, degree and nature of involvement of statutory bodies (most notably councils and Health and Social Care Partnerships), and local housing market conditions. Initial indications are that these 'sticking points' are likely to shift over time as Housing First services are mobilised and become more established.

A number of factors have facilitated the mobilisation and early implementation of the Pathfinders to date. Key amongst these have been: strong political commitment to Housing First at national and local levels (evidenced via Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan requirements and development, for example); a high level of buy-in from a number of key housing providers in Pathfinder areas; access to training on the key principles of Housing First and their translation into practice delivered by the Housing First Academy Training Hub; opportunities for shared learning via the Housing First Scotland Connect events; and examples of effective multi-agency joint working at the local level.

Factors inhibiting Pathfinder development and delivery have included, amongst others: the limited supply of suitable housing in some areas; delays accessing SWF grants for furnishing; miscommunication regarding targets in some areas; limited understanding of and/or buy-in to Housing First amongst some housing providers; divergent levels of risk appetite amongst key stakeholders; difficulties brokering access to a number of healthcare and/or other services; and the limitations placed on face-to-face support delivery during the pandemic.

Looking forward, whilst the need to implement Housing First in slightly different ways in different local contexts is widely acknowledged, there is a strong call for the preservation of commitment to fidelity as Housing First is rolled out more widely across Scotland. Concerns regarding three potential threats to fidelity are particularly prominent. These include risks that: a) sufficiently low staff caseloads will be jeopardised; b) limits may be imposed on the length of time that service users are able to receive Housing First support; and c) the separation of housing and support may be compromised if local authorities take Housing First provision 'in house'. Consideration of fidelity in the proposed Housing First Check-Up<sup>10</sup> appraisal process to be facilitated by Homelessness Network Scotland in partnership with the Scottish Government is therefore welcome.

Further reflection is also needed regarding whether and in what circumstances it may be appropriate to reduce levels of ('step down') or potentially even end ('stand down') Housing First support where service users no longer require the flexibility and intensity of support the approach offers. There is a strong call amongst Housing First practitioners to ensure that any such transitions are user led and that the option of reactivating Housing First support remain open given existing

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<sup>10</sup> Homeless Network Scotland (2021) *Housing First Check-Up: consultation on a quality-check for Scotland, Summer 2021*. Homeless Network Scotland, Glasgow.

evidence that some individuals will require intensive support in the long term<sup>11</sup>. The support of staff in enabling service users to make informed choices about any potential transition away from Housing First, actively encouraging reflection on possible implications and risks, will be critical.

Any further learning regarding these and other issues will be reported in future evaluation outputs, together with the cost-benefit analysis results and final outcomes data for people being supported by the Pathfinders across a range of domains.

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<sup>11</sup> Mackie, P., Johnsen, S. and Wood, J. (2017) *Ending Rough Sleeping: What Works? An international evidence review*. Crisis, London. Homeless Link (2019) *Exploring Patterns of Housing First Support: resident journeys*. Homeless Link, London.

# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Background and context

This interim report documents initial findings from an independent evaluation of Scotland's Housing First Pathfinder. The Pathfinder set out to scale up Housing First delivery in five areas across Scotland, encompassing six local authorities, including: Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire (henceforth referred to as Aberdeen/shire), Dundee, Edinburgh, Glasgow, and Stirling. The Pathfinder initially began supporting people in late 2018, was formally launched in April 2019, and will run until March 2022<sup>12</sup>. This report focusses on the process component of the evaluation, hence documents key achievements, challenges, and lessons learned during the design, mobilisation, and early implementation phases of the programme. Future reports will present outcomes for individuals being supported, calculate cost-benefits, and record implementational lessons learned over the longer term.

The Pathfinder was catalysed (and part-funded, until 2021) by Social Bite following the publication of research that assessed levels of core homelessness in the largest Scottish cities, reviewed evidence on best practice in addressing the needs of people experiencing the more complex forms of homelessness, and analysed views of key stakeholders regarding potential solutions in different contexts<sup>13</sup>. That study identified widespread support for the development of Housing First amongst key stakeholders, beyond the small-scale projects which already existed at the time (in Glasgow, Renfrewshire, East Dunbartonshire, and West Lothian). Calls for scaling up Housing First provision were further fuelled by the *Hard Edges Scotland* research which highlighted the scale of severe and multiple disadvantage in Scotland and the poor service response experienced by many of those affected<sup>14</sup>, together with compelling international evidence regarding the effectiveness of Housing First for people experiencing homelessness and complex needs<sup>15</sup>.

Commitment to Housing First has been a cornerstone of the Scottish Government and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA's) recent promotion of rapid rehousing<sup>16</sup> following recommendations of the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Action Group (HARSAG) in 2018<sup>17</sup>. Concomitantly, the development of a Scottish approach to Housing First was a key recommendation of the Scottish Parliament's Local Government and Communities Committee following a cross-party

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<sup>12</sup> The formal launch of the Pathfinder programme in April 2019 was preceded by a 'tune up' phase dating back to August 2018 during which governance structures were established and initial staff teams pulled together. A number of service users were recruited and housed during this phase, beginning in Glasgow, as reported in Chapter 3. Arrangements for the transitional year varied across the Pathfinders and had not all been finalised at the time of writing. Full details regarding these will be reported in future evaluation outputs.

<sup>13</sup> Littlewood, M., Bramley, G., Fitzpatrick, S. and Wood, J. (2017) *Eradicating 'Core Homelessness' in Scotland's Four Largest Cities: providing an evidence base and guiding a funding framework*. Social Bite, Edinburgh.

<sup>14</sup> Bramley, G., Fitzpatrick, S., Wood, J., Sosenko, F., Blenkinsopp, J., Littlewood, M., Frew, C., Bashar, T., McIntyre, J. and Johnsen, S. (2019) *Hard Edges Scotland: new conversations about severe and multiple disadvantage*. Lankelly Chase and The Robertson Trust, London.

<sup>15</sup> Mackie, P., Johnsen, S. and Wood, J. (2017) *Ending Rough Sleeping: What Works? An international evidence review*. Crisis, London.

<sup>16</sup> Scottish Government (2018) *Ending Homelessness Together: high level action plan*. Scottish Government and COSLA, Edinburgh. Scottish Government (2020) *Ending Homelessness Together: updated action plan, October 2020*. Scottish Government and COSLA, Edinburgh.

<sup>17</sup> Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Action Group (2018) *Ending Homelessness: report on the final recommendations of the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Action Group*. Scottish Government, Edinburgh.

inquiry into the scale and nature of homelessness in 2018<sup>18</sup>. Recommendations regarding the rollout of Housing First were further strengthened when HARSAG reconvened in 2020 to reflect on the implications of the coronavirus pandemic for responses to homelessness<sup>19</sup>. Scaling up Housing First across Scotland was included as a commitment in the Programme for Government published in September 2020<sup>20</sup>. The Scottish Government's long-term national housing strategy 'Housing to 2040' further confirms political commitment to Housing First at the highest level, stating that the "aim is for Housing First to be the default option for homeless people with multiple and complex needs" (p.35)<sup>21</sup>. A national framework to inform the planning, commissioning and implementation of Housing First in Scotland over the next ten years was launched in March 2021, following a period of consultation with stakeholders nationally<sup>22</sup>.

Given the clear connections with national policy objectives, the Scottish Government committed funding to the Pathfinder and became the main contributor. The Pathfinder programme has been funded by the Scottish Government (up to £6.5m), Social Bite (c.£2m) and Merchants House of Glasgow (c.£200k). Corra Foundation and Homeless Network Scotland were appointed fund and project managers, respectively. Turning Point Scotland was commissioned to provide training in Housing First principles and practice for Pathfinder providers and partners. Commitment to the seven key principles of Housing First<sup>23</sup> was a pre-requisite and core criterion used in the assessment of bids for Pathfinder funding.

In the final year of the programme (2021-2022) Corra Foundation will manage the distribution of up to £2.5m transition funding on behalf of the Scottish Government. This funding is designed to support up to half of the full cost of the Pathfinder programme as the process of mainstreaming Housing First in the five areas is implemented. Details regarding specific support commissioning and delivery arrangements during and after the transition year in each of the Pathfinder areas were still being finalised at the point of writing.

## 1.2 Evaluation aim, design and methods

The independent evaluation of Scotland's Housing First Pathfinder programme is being conducted by the Institute for Social Policy, Housing and Equalities Research (I-SPHERE) at Heriot-Watt University in collaboration with ICF. It was commissioned by Corra Foundation with funding from Social Bite. Ethical approval for the study was granted by Heriot-Watt University's School of Energy, Geosciences, Infrastructure and Society (EGIS) Research Ethics Committee.

The evaluation seeks to address the following questions regarding Scotland's Housing First Pathfinder programme:

- What are the outcomes for service users (in relation to housing, health, financial wellbeing etc.)?

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<sup>18</sup> Scottish Parliament (2018) *Local Government and Communities Committee Report on Homelessness*. Scottish Parliament, Edinburgh.

<sup>19</sup> Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Action Group (2020) *Tackling Homelessness in Scotland Following the Coronavirus Pandemic: recommendations from Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Action Group*. Scottish Government, Edinburgh.

<sup>20</sup> Scottish Government (2020) *Protecting Scotland, Renewing Scotland: The Government's Programme for Scotland 2020-2021*. Scottish Government, Edinburgh.

<sup>21</sup> Scottish Government (2021) *Housing to 2040*. Scottish Government, Edinburgh.

<sup>22</sup> Homeless Network Scotland (2021) *Branching Out: a national framework to start-up and scale-up Housing First in Scotland*. Homeless Network Scotland, Glasgow.

<sup>23</sup> <https://homelessnetwork.scot/housing-first/know-how/principles/>; Homeless Link (2017) *Housing First in England: the principles*. Homeless Link, London.

- To what extent have projects implemented and maintained fidelity to the core principles of Housing First? In what ways, if at all, has programme fidelity affected outcomes for users?
- What factors have facilitated or hindered Housing First development and achievement of particular outcomes?
- How much does it cost to deliver Housing First? What are the benefits? How do the benefits compare in value to the costs?
- What lessons might be drawn from the programme as Scotland moves toward 'Housing First by default' for homeless people with complex needs?

The evaluation design comprises three main elements:

- 1) An *outcomes evaluation* will document the outcomes individual service users achieve across a wide range of areas. This involves collation of outcomes monitoring data (from service users and frontline support workers), collected at the point service users are recruited to the Housing First programme and every six months thereafter over a period of two years.
- 2) A *process evaluation* investigates how the documented outcomes have been achieved, identifies factors that have facilitated or hindered delivery, assesses fidelity to Housing First principles, and draws together operational 'lessons learned'. This involves interviews with service users, providers, and other key stakeholders. A first wave of process data collection occurred in the early stages of operation; a second wave will be collected toward the end of the evaluation period.
- 3) A *cost-benefit analysis* (CBA) will calculate the costs and cost-benefits of Housing First. This will involve analysis of project-level costs data and anonymised individual service user outcomes data. The CBA will aim to identify, assess and as far as possible quantify in monetary terms all the financial and social costs and benefits relating to the Pathfinder, and, by comparing costs and benefits, assess whether the programme has delivered value for money.

These three threads of the evaluation are at different stages of completion given the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and associated restrictions. Data collection for the outcomes evaluation and cost-benefit analysis in particular have been severely delayed. This interim report therefore focuses in the main on the process thread of the evaluation, but nevertheless takes the opportunity to report on basic tenancy sustainment rates and provide an early indication as regards the cost of Housing First delivery. The full range of individual-level outcomes experienced by users will be reported within future evaluation outputs.

Four key data sources are drawn upon in the analysis presented in this interim report. The main source was data collected during the first (of two) waves of process evaluation interviews. The original intention was that all wave one interviews would be conducted (face-to-face) in early 2020, but the onset of the first pandemic lockdown in March 2020 led to the complete discontinuation of fieldwork. Fieldwork was not restarted until the end of summer 2020, and even then rolled into early 2021 given difficulties scheduling interviews given the unprecedented pressures faced by people working in the homelessness and allied sectors at the time<sup>24</sup>. All interviews conducted after the onset of the first lockdown were conducted remotely via videoconference or telephone.

Wave one process interview conversations focussed on experiences and lessons learned during project design, mobilisation and early implementation during the first 12-18 months of operation. They also incorporated an assessment of fidelity to each of the seven key principles of Housing

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<sup>24</sup> Fitzpatrick, S., Mackie, P., Pawson, H., Watts, B., and Wood, J. (2021) *The COVID-19 crisis response to homelessness in Great Britain: interim report*. Glasgow: CACHE.

First<sup>25</sup>, using a fidelity assessment method developed and quality controlled by Homeless Link. The fidelity assessment drew on data collected from interviews with Pathfinder managers, frontline support workers, external stakeholders and service users. It qualitatively assessed the Pathfinders' adherence to each principle (as either high, medium, or low).

Across the five Pathfinders, the first wave of the process evaluation data collection comprised interviews involving a total of 22 Pathfinder leads and consortia partner representatives working in managerial positions, 34 frontline support workers, and 17 representatives of external stakeholder agencies (including local authorities, health and criminal justice sectors, amongst others), and 29 individuals being supported by the Pathfinders<sup>26</sup>. Further to this, an interview was conducted with three national-level stakeholders with involvement across all five Pathfinders. The breakdown of interviewee numbers in the first wave of the process evaluation, which very broadly reflected the number of consortia providers and service users involved with each Pathfinder at the time in proportional terms (see Chapter 2), are portrayed in Table 1.1.

**Table 1.1: Number of wave one process evaluation interviewees, by Pathfinder**

	Providers/partners	Frontline staff	Stakeholders	Service users	Total
<b>Aberdeen/shire</b>	7	6	3	4	20
<b>Dundee</b>	3	7	2	6	18
<b>Edinburgh</b>	6	9	6	8	29
<b>Glasgow</b>	5	10	4	10	29
<b>Stirling</b>	1	2	2	1	6
<b>National</b>	3				3

A second complementary data source was a much smaller series of interviews with the leads and/or other senior representatives of each of the five Pathfinders (totalling n=6 individuals), held in June/July 2021. These focussed explicitly on the impacts of and Pathfinder responses to the coronavirus pandemic from the point of the first national lockdown in March 2020.

All interviews were recorded with the permission of interviewees and transcribed verbatim, and interview data analysed thematically using NVivo qualitative data analysis software.

The third data source comprised basic monitoring data which is collected from Pathfinders by Homeless Network Scotland on a monthly basis<sup>27</sup>. These 'tracker' data are used to capture the number and characteristics of people supported by the Pathfinders, together with tenancy sustainment rates, and the number of and reasons for ended tenancies, up until the end of June 2021.

The fourth data source included financial returns, submitted to Corra Foundation by the Pathfinders on a quarterly basis. These detail each Pathfinder's quarterly income and expenditure, using a

<sup>25</sup> Blood, I., Goldup, M., Peters, L., and Dulson, S, (2018) *Implementing Housing First across England, Scotland and Wales*. London: Crisis. Homeless Link (2017) *Housing First in England: the principles*. Homeless Link, London.

<sup>26</sup> While every effort was made to include cross-section of Housing First service users and experiences, it should be acknowledged that the research team is (inevitably) dependent on Pathfinder providers to put interviewees in touch with service users who are willing to participate in the evaluation. The intention is to conduct repeat interviews with this cohort in wave two to introduce a longitudinal dimension to the process evaluation. However, some degree of sample attrition is highly likely, hence the research team will seek to augment the sample in wave two with additional service users selected to enhance the overall representativeness of the sample insofar as possible.

<sup>27</sup> Key data from the Housing First Scotland tracker have been published on monthly basis since January 2019 and are available from <https://homelessnetwork.scot/housing-first/pathfinder/tracker/>.

common format, as well as quarterly expenditures by key delivery partners. Assessed alongside Pathfinder records regarding the cumulative numbers of people recruited/supported and the number of individuals housed each month, these figures were used to calculate unit costs for the programme from its inception until the end of March 2021. A full cost-benefit analysis will be included in future outputs when individual-level outcomes data is available (see above)<sup>28</sup>.

### 1.3 Report outline

This interim report consists of five further chapters. Chapter Two provides a descriptive overview of the characteristics of the five Pathfinders and an assessment of the fidelity of each to the seven principles of Housing First. Chapter 3 provides an account of the numbers of people being supported and housed, presents key tenancy sustainment figures, and reports on preliminary unit costs. Chapter 4 documents the key challenges and lessons learned during the design, mobilisation and early implementation phases of Pathfinder delivery. This is followed in Chapter 5 with an account of the experiences of people being supported by the Pathfinders in the earliest stages of delivery. The report concludes in Chapter 6 by drawing together key findings and identifying factors that have facilitated and inhibited Pathfinder design, mobilisation, and early stages of implementation.

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<sup>28</sup> A full social cost benefit analysis needs to consider all costs and benefits from a societal perspective, including benefits to individual and societal health and wellbeing. However, social benefits are often difficult to value in monetary terms, and it is likely that quantitative data on wellbeing outcomes will be limited. It is therefore likely that the CBA will focus on financial costs and benefits (including changes in the costs of public service delivery) and examine wellbeing outcomes more qualitatively. It is expected that, in addition to the direct costs of delivering the Pathfinders, there will be additional costs for other public services that support their delivery (e.g. physical and mental health, drugs and alcohol), and benefits through savings in other public services impacted by homelessness (including police and criminal justice, health services as well as homelessness services). The CBA will therefore assess net changes in demand for each of these services, which will be recorded largely through the outcomes data. The analysis of benefits will not be possible until 12 months outcomes data are available, so will be included in a second interim report. The analysis of the effects of the Pathfinders on wider costs of public service delivery will also draw on the outcomes data and be completed at the final report stage. The final report will therefore include a complete assessment of costs and benefits, developing the CBA model which will be used in the final analysis.

## 2. Pathfinder Descriptions and Fidelity Assessments

This chapter provides an overview of the key characteristics of, and fidelity assessment for, the five Pathfinders. For each it describes, firstly, the consortium composition, target group, referral process, housing type and tenure, arrangements for furnishing properties, and staffing arrangements. This is followed, secondly, by an assessment of fidelity to the seven core principles underpinning the Housing First approach. The fidelity assessment is for the most part based on pre-pandemic practice: comment is only made here on the implications of responses to the pandemic where they go beyond government guidance regarding social distancing and use of personal protective equipment (see Chapter 4). A high-level summary of service characteristics is provided in Table 2.1.

**Table 2.1 Pathfinder overview**

	<i>Aberdeen/shire</i>	<i>Dundee</i>	<i>Edinburgh</i>	<i>Glasgow</i>	<i>Stirling</i>
<i>Consortia composition</i>	Led by Aberdeen Cyrenians in partnership with Aberdeen Foyer, Turning Point Scotland, Aberdeen City Council, and Aberdeenshire Council	Led by Transform Community Development, in partnership with The Salvation Army, DSG (Dundee Survival Group), We Are With You (formerly Addaction)	Led by Edinburgh Cyrenians in partnership with Turning Point Scotland, Rock Trust, Streetwork, Bethany, Gowrie Care (now Hillcrest Futures), and Barony (now Wheatley Care)	Led by Turning Point Scotland in partnership with Simon Community Scotland, Salvation Army, and Loretto Care (now Wheatley Care)	Partnership between Loretto Care and Barony (which subsequently merged into Wheatley Care)
<i>Target group / eligibility</i>	Initially rough sleepers, then those in temporary accommodation who have experienced cyclical homelessness	Experience of multiple and complex needs, repeat homelessness, and willingness to engage with HF support	Experience of multiple and complex needs and been in homelessness system for many years	Experience of complex needs, over 18, and statutorily homeless	Experience of multiple and complex needs and repeat episodes of homelessness
<i>Referral</i>	Open, including self-referral. NDT used to assess eligibility and prioritise referrals	Open, including self-referral. Use of screening tool to assess eligibility	Mostly from council homelessness officers but other agencies do refer. NDT used to prioritise referrals	Open, referrals processed via consortium staff using HSCP processes after taking over the role from the HSCP	Referrer completes NDT. Case initially discussed with HF team, then assessed by referral panel.
<i>Type of housing</i>	All sectors, including council, RSL and (small amount of) PRS; all scatter-site	All social (predominantly council); all scatter-site (but plans to trial congregate)	All social (predominantly RSL), accessed via EdIndex CBL system; all scatter-site	Vast majority social (all of which RSL) with small minority PRS; all scatter-site	All social (predominantly RSL); scatter-site

<i>Tenancy type</i>	SST in social housing; Private Residential Tenancy in PRS	Mostly SST; SSSTs used with one HA	SST	SSTs in HA; Private Residential Tenancy in PRS	SST
<i>Intended staff:client ratio</i>	1:7	1:7	1:7	1:7	1:7
<i>Staff and out of hours coverage</i>	9-5 Monday to Friday (with some flexibility outside this); out of hours support throughout Pathfinder available from Aberdeen Cyrenians and Aberdeen Foyer	8:30am-5:30pm (with some flexibility evenings/weekends); helpline outside office hours	Office hours vary; all but one partner offers out of hours support	Staff shifts cover Monday to Saturday (9am-5pm and 11.30am-7.30pm), and 10-6 on Sundays; out of hours on call support provided	Staff work regular daytime shifts; out of hours support is available from staff in the residential centre within which the team is located
<i>Furnishing/personal budget</i>	Yes, c.£1,200.	Yes, £1,280	Yes, £1,500	Yes, £1,500	No, furnishing package provided
<i>Tenancy target</i>	120	100	275	315	20

## 2.1 Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire

### 2.1.1 Project overview

The Pathfinder operating across Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire is led by Aberdeen Cyrenians with Aberdeen Foyer and Turning Point Scotland as partner support providers. Other key partners also include Aberdeen City Council and Aberdeenshire Council. The Aberdeen City Health and Social Care Partnership and Grampian Housing Association are represented on the Board. This Pathfinder is unique for, firstly, including local authority as well as voluntary sector partners as formal members of the consortium, and secondly, covering a large rural area as well as a city.

Aberdeen City Council were in the process of developing a small test-of-change Housing First pilot in the city prior to the Pathfinder funding being released. Aberdeenshire Council were already operating a Housing First service which continues to run in parallel with the consortium's delivery in Aberdeenshire. After discussion amongst consortium members during the Pathfinder design process, it was felt that the consortium should include both councils such that the learning from the Pathfinder could feed across sectors in both geographic areas. The proposed test-of-change pilot in the city was not pursued given the Aberdeen/shire Pathfinder's development.

The Pathfinder developed a named list of people who were considered to be potential candidates for Housing First. It initially targeted the small population of known rough sleepers. Focus was then turned to people in temporary accommodation who have experience of cyclical homelessness and multiple and complex needs. Some of the earliest referrals were residents of two temporary accommodation units supporting people with complex needs that had been targeted for closure. Specific eligibility criteria for the intended Housing First for Youth element of the Pathfinder were still under development at the point of fieldwork.

Referrals may be made from any service and self-referrals are accepted, but in practice most come from the councils' Housing Options teams during statutory homelessness assessments. A checklist on the referral form offers an indication of an individual's experience of multiple and complex needs which is assessed in accordance with the New Directions Team assessment tool (sometimes referred to as the 'chaos index') in conjunction with data from other tools including the Outcomes Recovery Wheel and In-Form. Anonymised referrals are assessed and prioritised at a multi-agency screening panel.

Housing is sourced from every sector, with to date two thirds (66%) have been allocated from the city and shire councils, one quarter (24%) from RSLs, and the remainder (7%) the PRS (see Chapter 4). In Aberdeenshire, so few suitably sized properties become available that a number of temporary furnished flats have been 'flipped' into settled housing where a service user has consented to this. All properties were scatter-site at the point of fieldwork, but consideration was also being given to the potential of converting former hostels into Finnish-style congregate Housing First.

A personal budget of approximately £1,200 is provided by the Pathfinder for service users to furnish their property. Contracts are held with local suppliers for the purchase and installation of carpet and curtains, and deals have been made with the providers of good quality used furniture (e.g. British Heart Foundation) to maximise value for money. New furnishings may however be purchased from other retailers (e.g. Ikea) if service users prefer. The only divergence from this is where properties are flipped from temporary accommodation in Aberdeen/shire in which case the service user is given the existing furniture and the Pathfinder will support the service user to replace anything as/where required.

The staff team consists of senior practitioners, including the service manager, who were seconded from consortium partner providers, supported by practitioners who are either seconded or recruited externally. The service operates from 9-5 Monday-Friday, but there is an intention that staff work flexibly thereby allowing them to cover some out of hours appointments. Support staff time is split between covering the city and shire to spread the burden of the traveling time across the rural shire where public transport links are often poor or non-existent. An out of hours telephone helpline is provided.

### 2.1.2 Fidelity assessment

The Aberdeen/shire Pathfinder's degree of adherence to some Housing First principles might be described as high; others as high/medium. The actualisation of principles has been easier in the city as opposed to the shire where time required for travel has compromised staff members' ability to deliver support with the flexibility and intensity intended and provision regarding the choice of housing and furnishing is more constrained.

#### **Principle 1: People have a right to a home – High**

This principle is fully supported by the consortium members and frontline staff. There are no pre-conditions to eligibility for housing beyond a willingness to hold a tenancy. Once a service user has gone through a screening process, the Housing First service manager sends an email to housing providers stating that they are looking for a property in a particular area. Where a suitable property is available, the housing provider will then remove it from any advertising and close their list.

Properties are all single occupancy and scatter-site (albeit that the possibility of developing congregate housing was in early stages of consideration). All service users are given secure tenancy agreements, regardless of property type (that is, whether in the social or private sector).

Where the PRS has been used, rents have been negotiated to Local Housing Allowance rates. In some cases two-bedroom social rented sector properties have been provided and Discretionary Housing Payments secured to cover any additional rent that would otherwise be applied for under-occupation to ensure that they remain affordable.

### **Principle 2: Flexible support is provided for as long as needed – High/medium**

Support practitioners had maximum caseloads of seven, albeit that some interviewees thought a maximum caseload of five would be preferable, especially when supporting people in rural areas. Staff members officially worked 9-5 but were encouraged to be flexible with their hours, albeit that the extent to which they were able or willing to exercise this flexibility varied. Staff supporting service users in the shire reported spending much of their time travelling, which has limited the amount of time available for actual support delivery.

Out of hours, service users in the city had access to a Cyrenian's service (Street Alternative) which offered food and other services. All were also given the out of hours emergency number for the Housing First service.

Service users have been told the support will be available for as long as they need it, albeit that some provider interviewees expressed concern re the lack of assurance regarding continuation of funding. Any changes in the intensity of support are user-led.

Examples were given of support being provided to individuals on remand and serving longer prison sentences; in one case, a practitioner called the service user daily and visited frequently. Cases are to be 'archived' and later reactivated before the individual leaves prison where sentences are long and/or if they change their mind about wanting a tenancy.

### **Principle 3 – Housing and support are separated – High**

The provision of housing and support were regarded as fully separate. A Housing First tenant is treated as every other tenant and receives a secure tenancy regardless of which sector they are housed in. There are no conditions placed on the service user beyond the usual requirement that they look after the tenancy in line with their tenancy agreement.

The service is designed in such a way that eligibility for support is unaffected if a service user were to lose their tenancy. One provider interviewee emphasised that support would in fact increase were such a circumstance to occur so as to reduce the likelihood that the service user would cycle back through the homelessness system.

### **Principle 4 – Individuals have choice and control – High/medium**

The Housing First support service was described as client-led, with the nature and location of support delivery built around the wants and needs of the service user. Service users were encouraged and supported to choose amongst and access other support services as appropriate.

Service users have access to a furniture budget (held with the Pathfinder) to furnish properties. Most may choose furnishing styles and colours etc. from samples shown by the support staff and election from provider warehouses. Individuals in flipped tenancies do not have the same degree of choice given that these properties are already fully furnished; they are however supported by the

service to replace worn items. Service users also have access to modest discretionary funds via staff for specific items.

#### **Principle 5 – An active engagement approach is used – High/medium**

Support staff strongly advocated assertive and creative approaches to outreach, albeit that their ability to exercise these in practice was constrained by time spent travelling in the shire. Particular emphasis was placed on learning how and when a service user prefers to be contacted; so too 'not giving up' on them and being persistent in attempts to contact them even when a service user disengages.

Examples were given of 'turning up out of the blue', such as visiting other services that clients were known to frequent, as a means of recontacting individuals. It was made clear to service users that their case would not be closed even after periods of non-engagement. The pathfinder talked about 'archiving' cases in circumstances where service users wished to discontinue support.

One service user had been supported to leave the local authority area for safety reasons. The service ensured the case was taken on by another Housing First Pathfinder and only fully closed the file once assured that handover had taken place fully and the service user was safe and supported. This was the only reason, beyond a service user passing away, that practitioners could see a case being fully closed.

#### **Principle 6 – The service is based on people's strengths, goals and aspirations – High**

Frontline staff interviews emphasised the importance of building trusting relationships with service users in order to help ascertain what worked best for each individual in terms of making contact and support planning. The Outcome Web tool was used to help staff and service users identify strengths and potential priority areas to focus on in support planning. Staff interviewees nevertheless emphasised that some service users were less inclined to engage with 'paperwork' than others. In those circumstances the practitioner considers a key aspect of their role to be understanding a service user's self-identified needs and priorities and taking these forward in a way that was acceptable to them.

#### **Principle 7 – A harm reduction approach is taken – High**

Pathfinder staff used both harm reduction and motivational interviewing methods when engaging with service users. As the trust in the relationship with the staff built, service users were said to be more open to discussing issues they may need support with and are supported to identify coping and harm reduction strategies.

Service users were actively encouraged and supported to access other services that reduce harm and promote recovery. Staff acknowledged that they might not have the right skillset themselves to address issues the service users may present with, and in these instances would ensure the service user was linked with the relevant services.

Supporting individuals to move to alternative accommodation and/or other geographic areas in the few instances where tenants had been affected by 'cuckooing' (see s.4.6) were further examples of actions taken to prevent and/or manage the risk of harm.

## 2.2 Dundee

### 2.2.1 Project overview

The Dundee Pathfinder is led by Transform Community Development, in partnership with The Salvation Army, DSG (Dundee Survival Group), and We Are With You (formerly known as Addaction).

The Dundee Pathfinder's development came on the back of the city's Transformational Plan to review and reconfigure temporary accommodation provision. The group coordinating the plan had already conducted research into Housing First and concluded that it should be a key ingredient in the city's response to homelessness. Dundee does not have a large rough sleeping population, but it was felt that many of city's hostel residents would be ideal candidates for Housing First given the complexity of their needs and/or experiences of repeat homelessness.

The Dundee Pathfinder aims to support people experiencing multiple and complex needs and who have a history of repeat homelessness. A key target for referrals has been individuals within hostels for whom the council has discharged its homelessness duty, and those answering affirmatively to four or more questions on a six-question eligibility screening tool (which asks about lifetime experience of repeat homelessness, substance use, involvement with the criminal justice system, and current physical health issues, mental health issues, and/or any additional support needs), albeit that there is some flexibility in the application of this. Willingness to engage with the support provided by Pathfinder staff, as assessed during an initial six-week engagement period (see below), is an additional requirement.

Dundee's Pathfinder operates an open referral system wherein potential service users may self-refer. In practice, most referrals have come via the city's homeless hostels and the criminal justice system. Once a referral is received it is discussed by a multi-disciplinary panel comprising representatives of the council's Lettings Department, ASB team, Housing Options, and third sector providers whom assess suitability of Housing First for the individual referred and discuss identified risks. If eligibility criteria are met a referral interview with the potential service user is set up and the engagement assessment process begins. This aims to "get a handle on their willingness to engage" (Staff, Dundee); individuals who fail to engage with support during this period are not recruited but may be if they re-engage later on.

From week two of the engagement assessment process staff will help service users begin to look for a suitable property. A dedicated person in the council's Lettings department works to a specialist protocol to give Housing First clients priority to housing. The vast majority of housing is sourced via Dundee City Council and these tenants are given an SST. The Home Group housing association has also offered a number of tenancies; these are provided with SSSTs. Discussions are being had with Hillcrest HA with a view to expand the range of housing providers involved with the Pathfinder. To date no use has been made of the PRS given concerns about affordability, albeit that its utilisation has not been ruled out on grounds that the PRS offers properties in parts of the city where the council has very little or no stock.

All Housing First properties were scatter-site at the point of fieldwork, but initial plans were in place to trial a congregate form of Housing First in a former supported accommodation project. The intention is that this would be loosely based on a core-cluster congregate model adopted by the Y-Foundation in parts of Finland which works to a different set of principles<sup>29</sup>.

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<sup>29</sup> Finnish Y-Foundation Housing First programmes are underpinned by a different set of principles to those endorsed in most countries. The principles endorsed there promote choice in terms of engagement with

Each service user is allocated a personal budget to furnish their property. The total available is £1,280 per person but the actual spend averages approximately £780 per person. The Community Care Grant is utilised for purchasing white goods. Carpets and curtains are sourced from and fitted by local suppliers who offer a degree of choice from within an agreed price range. Transform Community Development's own second-hand furniture project is often used for sourcing furniture.

The original team of frontline 'specialist support workers' comprised secondments from partner providers, with external appointments made thereafter as the team has expanded. The team operate a shift system to allow for maximum coverage 8.30am-5.30pm, but this is implemented flexibly, with support delivered in evenings or at weekends when necessary, and staff taking time off in lieu accordingly. On call emergency cover is provided via a 24/7 telephone helpline.

### 2.2.2 Fidelity assessment

The Dundee Pathfinder exhibits a high degree of fidelity to most Housing First principles. It would have been assessed as having high fidelity across the board were it not for two attributes, these being: firstly, the requirement that users exhibit commitment to engaging with the support offered by the Pathfinder staff in order to be supported to access housing via Housing First; and secondly, the use of conditional SSSTs for some (albeit a minority) of service users.

#### **Principle 1: People have a right to a home – Low/medium**

The importance of this principle was emphasised by consortium members, frontline staff and other key stakeholder interviewees. The majority of clients are provided with a standard SST in council housing (but see below regarding exceptions to this). The protocols developed for the Pathfinder mean that a 'bank' of social housing properties is available for Housing First clients at any one point in time. Properties were typically accessed within 2-3 months of recruitment to the programme pre-pandemic.

The practical application of this principle is however compromised by the six-week assessment of service users' willingness to engage with the support provided by the Pathfinder (demonstrated by turning up for appointments for example); their eligibility for housing via the programme hinges on a positive assessment during this period. Disengagement from support after this assessment period does not affect a service user's ongoing entitlement to either housing or support (see below), but the fact that eligibility for housing via the programme is contingent on more than just a willingness to maintain a tenancy weakens fidelity to this principle.

The use of SSSTs for those individuals accessing properties let by the Home Group housing association – which are different to and less secure than those offered to other tenants accessing social housing – further compromises fidelity to this principle. The Home Group is able to offer suitable properties within city centre locations, thereby offering choice in a popular area, but does employ a more conditional type of tenancy for Housing First clients than is true of other tenants.

#### **Principle 2: Flexible support is provided for as long as needed – High/medium**

Initial staff recruitments came through secondment opportunities and all had a background of working with the Housing First client group. All staff interviewees expressed enthusiasm about

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treatment and services but not housing type or location. For details see: <https://ysaatio.fi/en/housing-first-finland>.

working with the Housing First principles to offer person-led, flexible support. The staff:client ratio is 1:7 (including cases undergoing the engagement assessment); caseloads only exceed seven when staff are temporarily covering colleagues during periods of leave or illness.

Service users determine the amount and type of support provided, albeit are subject to the fixed-term engagement assessment. The team works flexibly to cover out of hours and weekends, such that they can accompany clients to appointments of events outside of standard office hours as necessary. 24-hour support is available in emergencies and service users are also given details for relevant services that may be more appropriate depending on the nature of an emergency.

The first appointment is held in the Pathfinder office, but service users can choose when/where they meet thereafter, for example in a café. Once a service user has moved into their property, they are given a mobile phone so they can be contacted. There has been occasion, depending on need, that service users have been supplied with a phone before they move in but this is determined on a case by case basis.

Provision is made for cases to lie dormant during periods of disengagement following the initial assessment period (see above), and support is provided for people to move to an alternative property should the need arise.

### **Principle 3 – Housing and support are separated – Low/Medium**

The requirement that service users demonstrate commitment to engage with support during the initial six-week assessment period in order to access housing via the Pathfinder compromises fidelity to this third principle (as well as the first). Continued eligibility for housing and support under Housing First is not conditional on engagement following this initial assessment period, however.

Whilst Pathfinder staff expressed confidence that the small number of SSSTs issued would not be in jeopardy if a service user were to disengage from support, any such consequences remain untested. No SSSTs had been converted to SSTs at the point of fieldwork.

Staff have however had experience of service users being remanded or imprisoned and have continued to support them or have discussed relinquishing their tenancy but continuing to provide support if a sentence is long. In such cases they will be ready to support the service user once they have a release date.

### **Principle 4 – Individuals have choice and control – High**

Staff support service users to live in a location of their choice, insofar as availability (which is limited in the city centre) allows. Relationships are being built with other housing providers, especially those offering suitable city centre properties with a view to increasing the choice available.

To date, all properties have been scatter-site. It should nevertheless be noted that the use of congregate housing, should that be implemented going forward, will compromise fidelity to this principle unless residents have expressed an explicit preference to live in this form of accommodation. If 'the offer' for an individual is congregate accommodation (only), it will not be possible to claim that have been given a genuine opportunity to exercise choice as regards housing type.

Personal budgets and arrangements with local carpet and curtain suppliers has enabled service users to exercise a substantial (but not unlimited) degree of choice in how their homes are furnished. The

use of Community Care Grants to provide white goods and Transform Community Development's own second-hand furniture scheme allow users to 'stretch' their personalisation budget.

All support worker interviewees expressed commitment to delivering person-led and flexible support. Service user interviewees all reported that the support they received was superior to that they had previously experienced, especially as regards the longevity of support and freedom from requirements that they behave in a certain way. Individuals' choices regarding levels of engagement do not affect their eligibility for either housing or support housing after the initial assessment period.

Staff take different approaches as regards describing the longevity of support: some tell service users that it will be available for as long as they need it; others are more circumspect and note that that is the intention but no firm guarantees have been obtained regarding the continuation of funding after the formal Pathfinder period.

### **Principle 5 – An active engagement approach is used – High**

Many examples of how the team were delivering an active engagement approach were reported by staff and service users. Service users were aware they could contact their support worker and even if their response may not be immediate, they would be re-contacted as soon as possible. The fact that they always responded was said by service users to be hugely influential in building a trusting partnership.

Support workers talked about 'doing what it takes', being flexible, and 'switching things up' if existing arrangements were not working during and after the engagement assessment period. This included allowing service users to choose to change support worker if the relationship was not working for them, or it was felt another support worker could offer more tailored support for another part of a service user's journey.

Examples were also given of partnership working to re-open lines of communication where a service user had withdrawn from support. The support worker would 'go the extra mile' to find out if the service user was safe and to let them know they were still there for them as soon as the service user wanted to re-engage.

### **Principle 6 – The service is based on people's strengths, goals and aspirations – High**

There was clear buy-in from the managers and frontline staff as regards the provision of support that actively promoted a strengths-based approach. The Better Futures database was used to support conversations and recording in relation to users' goals and support planning. The Better Futures tool has capacity to allow service users to access their own records through the 'café mode' and the team anticipate offering this functionality to service users soon.

The Pathfinder has expressed commitment to encourage individuals with lived experience to be more formally involved in service delivery going forward.

### **Principle 7 – A harm reduction approach is taken - High**

A clear commitment to harm reduction is central to the Dundee Pathfinder's service philosophy and delivery. Support workers were Naloxone trained to deal with overdoses. The team take a positive approach to respectfully support and advise service users with regard to addiction and mental health. Service user interviewees talked at length about not wishing to have things 'done to' them and welcomed support workers' motivational and asset based approach in this respect.

## 2.3 Edinburgh

### 2.3.1 Project overview

The Edinburgh Pathfinder is led by Edinburgh Cyrenians as part of a large consortium involving Turning Point Scotland, Rock Trust, Streetwork at Simon Community Scotland, Bethany, Gowrie Care (now Hillcrest Futures), and Barony (now Wheatley Care). Funding to consortia members was provided in tranches, with different providers becoming actively involved in the delivery of support as the number of referrals increased and frontline support workers were recruited accordingly.

The Pathfinder targets individuals with experience of multiple and complex needs who have been cycling around the homelessness system for many years. Focus was concentrated initially on individuals who had been statutorily homeless for more than three years. Referrals are processed and prioritised by the consortium manager and leader of the council's Access Point housing team which specialises in provision for homeless people with significant support needs.

Referrals include a New Directions Team (NDT) assessment and are mostly made by council housing officers and social workers, Access Practice specialist homelessness healthcare medical practitioners, but can also be made by other agencies. Once consortia partners have sufficient capacity to support new referrals via the tranche system, a multi-agency allocations meeting is held to discuss a short-list of prioritised referrals. Referrals relating to young people are sent directly to Rock Trust where they are assessed by Rock Trust staff in liaison with the council's specialist young people's housing officers.

Almost all housing has been allocated via the city's EdIndex common housing register which involves a partnership between the council and multiple housing associations/cooperatives. The EdIndex system offers choice-based lettings wherein service users can bid for properties within a priority-based system. Housing First users are given additional points and therefore enhanced priority within the system on grounds of the length of time since their first homelessness application and/or history of rough sleeping. The small number of tenancies allocated outwith EdIndex were allocated under the oversight of the EdIndex Board. At the end of June 2021, 77% of properties had been allocated by RSLs and 23% the council.

Service users are allocated £1,500 personal allowance to furnish their new home. Support staff are given credit cards to facilitate the purchase of new or second-hand furniture, and clients also have access to a number of furniture initiatives within the city. Community Care Grants are used to purchase white goods and starter packs are also provided by a local charity.

Operating hours vary amongst consortium members organisations, but all are implemented flexibly such that frontline staff can work evening and weekends where necessary. All but one of the providers have their own out of hours service which Housing First clients may utilise. Service users are encouraged to make use of existing services across the city in out of hour emergencies.

### 2.3.2 Fidelity assessment

In terms of design, the Edinburgh Pathfinder can be regarded as having high fidelity to Housing First principles. The practical operationalisation of some principles has however been very challenging, as noted below.

### **Principle 1: People have a right to a home – High/Medium**

This principle was strongly supported by provider and key informant interviewees. Support staff were committed to ensuring service users were housed as quickly as possible in an area of their choosing by helping with the bidding process. All key informants and staff interviewees agreed that many service users have been successfully housed in their preferred area through this process as a result of their enhanced priority within the system. On the face of it, this system also offers maximum user choice as regards housing within the social rented sector.

That said, issues had been encountered wherein some service users had apparently been ‘bypassed’ on the system by landlords who knew them and held an unfavourable opinion regarding the risks they posed and/or were insufficiently aware of the support available to Housing First clients. This happens outwith support workers’ knowledge and control, hence they do not have an opportunity to advocate on clients’ behalf.

Whilst there is no way of quantifying the prevalence of this issue, there was a widely shared view amongst consortium members that it was relatively common and had hindered the ability of some service users to access housing. A minority of service users had been bidding unsuccessfully for up to a year. The consortium was endeavouring to find solutions to this issue, within or outwith the EdIndex system, at the point of fieldwork. Until such time as this is resolved, the choice-based lettings system might theoretically appear a very good fit with this first principle by offering priority access to and maximal choice of housing, but these benefits are moot given the practice of bypassing.

### **Principle 2: Flexible support is provided for as long as needed – High**

Support is flexible and person centred with each support worker working with (at most) 1:7 service users pro rata. The location of support delivery varies according to the wishes of the service user, including for example their home, parks and cafes. Support workers sometimes accompany service users to appointments and advocate on their behalf, but only if the service user wishes this.

Cases are not closed but rather lie dormant after an extended period of attempting to re-engage with tenants who disengage from support. Housing First support would only end if clients no longer wanted it. At the point of fieldwork a small number of clients had wanted to move out of the area and had been supported to do so. Those cases were considered dormant rather than closed.

The council has committed to funding the support of existing clients following the end of the Pathfinder period. Service users have been informed that they will receive support for as long as they need it, with the caveat that the organisation providing it may potentially change depending on the outcome of the commissioning process.

### **Principle 3 – Housing and support are separated - High**

Support provider interviewees raised the issue of the separation of housing and support without prompting. All tenancies were SSTs without behavioural conditions beyond those typical for other social housing tenants. One support worker reported experience of a housing provider wanting to issue a conditional SSST to a particular client, but this had been resisted and a standard SST issued.

Examples were given of service users being remanded into custody; in these cases support workers had continued to contact and/or visit them regularly. Arrangements had been made for rent and bills to be paid during short sentences. In the case of long sentences, support workers would assist

the service user to give up a tenancy and pack up and store their belongings with a view to supporting them to access new housing upon release.

#### **Principle 4 – Individuals have choice and control – High/medium**

This principle is strongly supported by providers and support staff across the whole consortium. Service users are in theory given a substantial amount of choice regarding available housing via the CBL system, but that the operation of this is not without problems such that the practical realisation of this level of choice is moot (see above and s.4.4.1).

Support planning and delivery is also led by service users' needs, preferences and goals. Many examples were given of adherence to individual's wishes regarding the frequency and location of support delivery. A number of service user interviewees emphasised that their experiences of Housing First were very different to other services they had used in the past given the greater level of control offered.

Service users also have substantial choice as regards choosing how to make their new property a home with their £1,500 personal allowance, with the option of buying used or new furniture from a range of local providers.

#### **Principle 5 – An active engagement approach is used – High**

Support workers gave myriad examples of the active and 'sticky' aspects of service delivery, doing what they could to engage the service user and checking on their wellbeing when they had disengaged. This often involved getting in touch with other agencies who may have been in contact with a disengaged client and, in some cases, actively searching them out in locations they are known to frequent.

Service users are supported on an individual basis and if a 'clash of personalities' is identified support is handed over to another worker. As noted above, support workers retain contact with service users on remand and during prison sentences. Support workers talked about 'doing whatever it takes', but being patient given that engagement does not always happen immediately. One of the providers had instigated a 'contact within 7 days' policy with service users' agreement for safeguarding reasons.

Whilst upholding the principle of choice, support staff were proactive in assisting service users to navigate the EdIndex system. This included making them aware of the disadvantages and risks associated with bidding for properties in city centre locations where they would in all likelihood be in competition with other Housing First clients and/or bidding for a property close to individuals they were known to have (or have previously had) a fractious or exploitative relationship. Some service users had reconsidered their chosen area(s) of preference as a consequence.

#### **Principle 6 – The service is based on people's strengths, goals and aspirations – High**

All consortium partners use the Outcome Star tool which they believed was well aligned with this principle. Support worker interviewees fully supported and often made reference to this principle when describing how they work with individuals they support. Many were keen to emphasise that some goals and aspirations could be very modest ('small') and/or short term in nature, but were no less significant in influencing peoples' recovery journeys and outcomes for that fact.

## Principle 7 – A harm reduction approach is taken – High/Medium

A harm reduction approach was highlighted by provider interviewees as being at pivotal to their approach. Support workers were clearly attuned to and working in ways that accord with this model, even if they did not specifically refer to harm reduction *per se*. Service users were actively encouraged to engage with relevant substance misuse and/or alcohol services and recovery communities. Some interviewees did however identify a need for additional training in this general area, especially as regards intersections with mental health crisis services and responding to gatekeeping practices.

### 2.4 Glasgow

#### 2.4.1 Project overview

The Housing First Glasgow consortium is led by Turning Point Scotland (TPS) in partnership with Simon Community Scotland, Loretto Care (now part of Wheatly Care), and the Salvation Army (SA). The SA has had a separate contract with the Glasgow City Health and Social Care Partnership (HSCP) which was awarded in advance of the Pathfinder grant making process; this focussed specifically on the resettlement of residents of the decommissioned Clyde Place hostel. The consortium works in partnership with the Glasgow City Health and Social Care Partnership (HSCP).

Following closure of the (male only) Clyde Place hostel, the HSCP developed a named ‘complex case’ list; most of the individuals identified were rough sleeping. Attempts to contact these individuals were time and resource intensive, and uptake of the offer of Housing First by members of this group low. The focus of attention thereafter shifted to women with complex needs who were in temporary accommodation and had been using services for prolonged periods of time. The target group latterly evolved toward more general criteria including individuals with experience of complex needs aged 18 or over and assessed as statutorily homeless.

External referrals (from any agency) and internal (HSCP) referrals are assessed by a multi-agency allocations panel which includes representatives from consortium partners, the HSCP, occupational health, addiction and mental health services. When the Pathfinder was first developed, HSCP employees processed Pathfinder referrals and assessments, as had been the arrangement for the SA commissioned service. The referral assessment process was subsequently taken on by consortium staff so as to expedite the assessment and recruitment of eligible individuals (see Chapter 4), albeit that HSCP referral and assessment forms continue to be used. A recommendation regarding the number of hours support that an individual might need as a ‘support package’ is provided, albeit that this is operationalised flexibly. Further adaptations to the process had not been ruled out at the point of fieldwork and will be reported in future outputs.

Virtually all Glasgow Pathfinder clients are allocated social housing via the Wheatley Group or one of the other housing associations operating in the city (as Glasgow City Council has no stock of its own). A small number of private let properties (totalling 1% of all Pathfinder tenancies allocated) have been accessed via Homes For Good (Scotland) CIC, a private sector lettings agency specialising in the provision of homes for people on low incomes and receiving benefits.

Each service user is allocated a personal allowance, or ‘supervised spend’, of £1,500 to help furnish their new property. This is often supplemented with a local authority grant for white goods. The commissioned SA service allows service users to choose either the (£1,500) personalised supervised spend or a furniture package (valued at £3,000). Some of the housing providers, including the Wheatley Group which has allocated the greatest number of properties, also provide a starter pack

for new tenants. The consortium was also piloting a system wherein lead practitioners could use credit cards to enable spot purchases where appropriate.

Support staff are seconded to or under management agreements (a less formal arrangement) with TPS, paid via the Pathfinder but employed by the consortium member. The staff team includes paid peer workers who have lived experience of homelessness, alcohol and/or drug misuse. All staff were co-located in a single office pre-COVID. The operating hours of the service includes two shifts covering Monday to Saturday 9am-5pm and 11.30am-7.30pm, with an additional shift covering 10am-6pm on Sundays. An out of hours on-call service staffed by Lead Practitioners is provided.

#### 2.4.2 Fidelity assessment

The Glasgow Pathfinder was designed with the intention of being a high fidelity Housing First service, but the impact of staffing shortages (see s.4.2) and active attempts to embed the service within existing statutory strategies and processes (see s.4.1) has compromised the consortium's operationalisation of some principles, most notably its ability to deliver the desired flexibility and intensity of support.

##### **Principle 1: People have a right to a home – High**

Commitment to Principle 1 featured strongly across participant interviews, albeit that the Pathfinder is operating within a social housing allocation system that is widely acknowledged to be complex and 'cumbersome'. Housing First users are not given priority within this system, hence access housing on the same terms as other (non Housing First) applicants and encounter the same challenges in accessing social housing as other prospective tenants.

All social lets issued have been SSTs, and private lets Private Residential Tenancies, that is, standard tenancy agreements for those tenures within the city. The consortium had been pressured by some RSLs to offer SSSTs, but consortium partners had successfully resisted this at the point of fieldwork. Service users' eligibility for housing is thus not contingent on any condition beyond willingness to maintain a tenancy and the usual expectations of any other social housing tenant.

##### **Principle 2: Flexible support is provided for as long as needed – Medium/low**

This principle has always been central to the Glasgow Pathfinder's intended approach, but its ability to deliver support with the degree of flexibility and intensity intended was severely hindered, especially in the earliest days of implementation, given difficulty recruiting support workers (see s.4.2). The maximum formal caseload was always intended to be 1:7 but staff found themselves supporting many more than that on occasion. Referrals were frozen for a period in order to remedy this issue whilst more staff were recruited.

Time absorbed by travelling and dealing with what were described as 'clunky' IT systems to provide support was also noted to further thwart staff members' ability to respond spontaneously to service users' needs (see s.4.5.2). Consideration was being given to adopting a locality approach to mitigate these issues at the point of fieldwork.

Support staff were advised to inform service users that support would be available for as long as was needed, even if there was potential that the support provider may change in future.

### **Principle 3 – Housing and support are separated – High**

This principle was supported strongly by interviewees and evidenced via the successful opposition to requests that SSST agreements be used with some clients. The expectations of service users regarding tenancy security are the same as for other residents of those tenures (in both private and social rented sectors). Further to this, tenancy security is unaffected if service users disengage with support: cases are kept open and proactive attempts made to re-engage the individual concerned.

There are no consequences should a service user abandon or be evicted from their tenancy; rather, support workers continue to work with them and try to find alternative accommodation. At the point of fieldwork, a number of service users were already being supported whilst in prison or undergoing residential rehabilitation for substance misuse and will continue to be supported by the Housing First team upon leaving.

### **Principle 4 – Individuals have choice and control – High/medium**

Service users have as much choice and control over the type and location of their housing as any other prospective social housing tenant in the city. They also have choice and control regarding the development of their support plans, but with the important caveat noted above regarding limits to the amount of time staff can devote to support them with this. Choices regarding the location of support delivery are user-led.

Each service user supported by the consortium receives a personal allowance of £1,500 to furnish their new property from a provider of their choice. This is often supplemented with a local authority grant for white goods and/or starter pack provided by specific housing providers. The commissioned Salvation Army service offers a choice of the supervised spend funds or a furniture package. The option of the furniture package being rolled out to service users supported by the consortium had been resisted by other providers on grounds that it places limits on user choice (to a restricted range of types/colours), even if it does have the advantage of enabling a property to be furnished comparatively quickly (see s.4.4.2).

### **Principle 5 – An active engagement approach is used – High/medium**

The central role that this principle played in shaping the intended approach to service delivery was clearly evident. Staff described being “persistent and chipping away”, with effort dedicated to contacting service users’ current support services and seeking out opportunities to ‘bump into’ them at favoured haunts and/or regular appointments should they disengage. Staff members also emphasised that “planning support on their turf” was paramount when building relationships with service users.

Attentiveness, persistence and respect were identified as other critical elements to their approach, as was the importance of staff exhibiting integrity by following through with agreed tasks. Staff members’ capacity to deliver on these ideals were however compromised when they found themselves supporting more than the intended maximum of seven people. Some stakeholder interviewees observed that the frequency of support workers’ contact with Housing First clients was much lower than they had anticipated.

### **Principle 6 – The service is based on people’s strengths, goals and aspirations – Medium**

The support workers interviewed were clear that the Pathfinder aimed for service users to be very involved in person-centred support and goals planning, but acknowledged that their ability to

support clients in this process had been limited by staff shortages (in the early days of operation, at least).

The HSCP assessment forms used were described as being deficit and needs-focused, and therefore as failing to reflect a strengths-based approach. Further to this, staff shortages had led to a backlog of incomplete support plans for existing clients in the early phases of mobilisation.

In addition, challenges associated with external agencies 'dropping' service users once they had been recruited to Housing First (see s.4.5.5) were said to further compromise support workers' ability to ensure service users were provided with the wrap-around support needed to help them achieve their goals.

### **Principle 7 – A harm reduction approach is taken – High/medium**

The harm reduction philosophy was endorsed strongly by partner providers and many examples given regarding the ways in which this shaped day-to-day interaction with service users, especially in relation to substance misuse. Further to this, the acquisition of temporary accommodation for rough sleepers who were willing to reside in it until settled accommodation was sourced was deemed to be reflective of the Pathfinder's harm reduction philosophy.

A few frontline staff interviewees nevertheless noted that the promotion of harm reduction activities was accorded lower priority than is perhaps ideal given the greater emphasis placed on accessing tenancies and supporting people to move into their new homes as quickly as possible. They were hopeful that this situation would be remedied when staff shortages were resolved and more time could be invested in supporting the reduction of harms associated with substance misuse and poor mental health.

## **2.5 Stirling**

### **2.5.1 Project overview**

The smallest of the Pathfinders with a target of just 20 tenancies, Housing First Stirling was developed by a consortium comprising Loretta Care and Barony, whom were partner organisations in the Wheatley Group at the time and have since merged into a single company (Wheatley Care). Stirling does not have a significant rough sleeping problem, but the consortium partners have had an established history of working with people experiencing multiple and complex needs and were eager to extend their engagement with this population by leading the delivery of Housing First services in Stirling.

The Stirling Pathfinder aims to support people who are homeless and have multiple and enduring support needs. It specifically targets individuals with experience of repeat homelessness, that is, those for whom a staged approach to resettlement has not worked. The intention has been that priority be given to those who have experienced the longest and most enduring episodes of homelessness.

The referral process usually starts with a telephone call to the Housing First team. Referrers then complete a referral form which incorporates an NDT assessment. This is typically discussed with the Housing First coordinator before being assessed by a referral panel which includes a representative from Stirling Council. The majority of referrals come via the Housing Options and Allocations Team and criminal justice services but are also welcomed from other voluntary and statutory services.

Initially, all properties were sourced via Forth Housing via a system wherein the housing association let the council know as soon as they had received a notice to quit from an existing tenant (issued 28 days before vacating). The Housing First team then had five days to determine whether a property was within an area chosen by and deemed suitable for a Housing First user, whereby that individual was given first option on it. If/when no such properties are available, the usual lettings process is used. The council has also provided properties for Housing First (around one quarter of lets by the end of June 2021). At the point of fieldwork, plans were being made to encourage involvement from other housing providers.

The Wheatley Group provides furniture and furnishing packages directly to service users, at no cost to them, from a limited range of options. Tenants are also supported to make applications to the Scottish Welfare Fund to help with the process of setting up their home. Other resources such as starter packs are sourced via established relationships with other local service providers.

Staff are employed directly through Wheatley. The team initially comprised a Health and Wellbeing Team Leader supported by a Health and Wellbeing Assistant. Shifts are arranged flexibly so that cover is provided at evenings and weekends. Office space and infrastructure for the staff team is located within an existing service (which provides supported accommodation and outreach for young people) operated by Wheatley (formerly Loretto Care). Out of hours support is provided by staff in the residential service.

### 2.5.2 Fidelity assessment

The Stirling Pathfinder exhibits a high degree of fidelity to almost all the principles of Housing First: the only (minor) deviation relates to limitations on user choice regarding furnishings, and this is considered an acceptable trade-off by the provider given that the use of furniture packages speeds up the process of furnishing a new home.

#### **Principle 1: People have a right to a home – High**

This principle was strongly endorsed by provider and stakeholder interviewees, whom expressed a desire to prioritise service users' access to housing as quickly as possible. A strong working relationship with Forth Housing had enabled development of the system granting Housing First users priority access to available tenancies.

Housing First staff liaise closely with housing colleagues regarding the potential suitability of a property before helping service users assess whether it might meet their needs. A community mapping exercise has been conducted in liaison with housing colleagues to identify localised areas where complaints about antisocial behaviour are common, for example, and this intelligence is used to help service users make informed choices about their housing.

Service users are provided an SST. The Pathfinder is committed to ensuring that they will not lose their housing if they disengage from or no longer require support.

Limited availability and low levels of turnover amongst suitable properties within the city, especially one-beds, has however made the process of sourcing properties challenging (see Chapter 4).

#### **Principle 2: Flexible support is provided for as long as needed – High**

This principle was similarly endorsed via a commitment for support to be flexed according to the needs of service users. Staff shifts had been designed to maximise their availability. Representatives

from the council and Forth HA attended training in the principles of Housing First (via the Housing First Academy) alongside Wheatley staff and are therefore cognisant of the differences between Housing First and traditional approaches as regards the centrality of flexible support to service delivery.

The importance of support being available for as long as is needed was emphasised by a number of interviewees. A degree of commitment to the continuation of funding had been obtained from the council fairly early on. Housing First staff had nevertheless elected not to discuss what would happen at the end of the Pathfinder period with users on grounds that doing so would not be constructive.

### **Principle 3 – Housing and support are separated – High**

There are no requirements of service users beyond that that they abide by their tenancy agreement as is the case for any other social housing tenant. A clear distinction is made between the role of housing association staff as enforcers of tenancy rules, and the Housing First team as providers of support. That said, staff noted that the positive relationships built with housing officers meant that Housing First clients were less fearful or suspicious and therefore more willing to engage with them than were individuals using some of Wheatley Care's other services.

A strong working relationship between the Pathfinder and main housing provider has meant that relevant parties are able to act swiftly and proactively to resolve any problems associated with a Housing First tenancy. This is facilitated, in part, by the small size of the respective teams (each with only a few staff members), and the fact other stakeholders have attended training in Housing First principles.

### **Principle 4 – Individuals have choice and control – High/Medium**

This principle was embedded in the Pathfinder's approach to support delivery, and an emphasis placed on ensuring that service users were clear from the first meeting that they need not do or say anything to 'make themselves fit' the programme. Service users are fully involved with their support planning and can choose the frequency of visits, albeit that the Pathfinder prefers to have some form of contact with service user every week. The time that the team will allow to have elapsed before making such contact, using the details of alternative contacts provided by the service user, is determined on a case-by-case basis.

Service users are encouraged to make informed choices about housing, using intelligence regarding potential factors that might influence property availability and/or other issues that might affect their experience in particular neighbourhoods (e.g. prevalence of antisocial behaviour). Service users are offered a choice of furniture and furnishings from within a limited range of options (in terms of size and colour, for example) offered as a package by Wheatley. This arrangement was reported to expedite the process of furnishing properties (see Chapter 4) but does restrict the degree of user choice and therefore compromise fidelity to this principle to a minor degree.

### **Principle 5 – An active engagement approach is used – High**

Staff were persistent in proactively contacting service users even when they had expressed a disinclination to engage with support. Support workers would encourage the individuals they worked with to be open about the reasons underpinning temporary period of disengagement and use these conversations to further strengthen their relationship with service users wherever possible.

The provision of support continued when tenancies ended, such as when tenants were recalled for long-term prison sentences, for example. In one such instance, the council elected to cover the cost of a service user's rent whilst an individual was incarcerated on grounds of potential costs savings when compared with using temporary accommodation upon release.

### **Principle 6 – The service is based on people's strengths, goals and aspirations – High**

The principle is fully embedded within the Stirling Pathfinder. The Outcomes Star tool is used to support the user-led identification of and planning regarding service users' strengths, goals and aspirations. An action plan is co-created with the service user (if/when they are willing to engage in the process), wherein decisions are made regarding who is responsible for doing what and in what timescale. This action plan is adapted as and when a service user's circumstances and/or priorities change. The location of any existing (positive) family support networks is taken into consideration during the community mapping exercise (see above). The provider's reference to individuals using the service as 'people we work for' is further indicative of the Pathfinder's person-centred and strengths-based philosophy.

### **Principle 7 – A harm reduction approach is taken – High**

Although the Pathfinder's philosophy was not described expressly in terms of harm reduction, staff described activities that reduce harm and promote recovery in a range of areas relating to health and wellbeing, including facilitating individuals' access to other services that aim to keep people 'safe and well'. Risks to and from service users was continuously reassessed. A system for escalating concerns regarding an individual's safety in instances of non-engagement was developed on a case-by-case basis.

## **2.6 Conclusion**

All five Pathfinders target the population traditionally supported by Housing First programmes, that being homeless people with multiple and complex needs who often experience long-term or repeat homelessness. The size and structure of consortia varies substantially, especially as regards the number of partners and/or degree of involvement of statutory bodies. The contexts and systems within which the Pathfinders operate also differ markedly. Together, these variations have afforded valuable opportunity to reflect on shared and locality-specific challenges and responses in the delivery of Housing First at scale. The lessons learned from these are documented in the next chapter.

On the issue of fidelity, almost all Pathfinders have succeeded in operationalising the majority, if not all, of the seven principles of Housing First to either a high or high/medium degree. Some deviations are however evident. Where they have occurred, departures from these principles have resulted from either: a) deviations in programme design; or b) the effects of (external or internal) factors which have inhibited Pathfinders' ability to deliver the service in the way intended.

Examples of deviations in design include requirements that individuals exhibit commitment to engaging with Housing First support in Dundee (affecting adherence to principles 1 and 3) and the use of SSSTs for a subset of service users in Dundee (also affecting principles 1 and 3). The limited choice regarding furnishing in Stirling and Aberdeenshire could also be regarded as a minor deviation in design (affecting adherence to principle 4), but this was considered an acceptable trade-off by local providers given that the use of furniture packages (which offer some, albeit restricted, choice) expedites the furnishing process (see s.4.4.2). The use of congregate accommodation, under

consideration in Aberdeen/shire and Dundee, would represent a further deviation by design unless residents express an explicit preference for this form of housing.

Examples of compromises to fidelity resulting from factors inhibiting delivery have included the bypassing of Housing First users by RSLs in Edinburgh's housing allocations system (affecting principle 1), and restricted capacity of workers to deliver sufficiently flexible support in Glasgow due to staff recruitment difficulties and higher than intended caseloads (principle 2). The absence of certainty regarding the continuation of funding after the transition period also meant that none the Pathfinders could give service users total assurance regarding the open-endedness of support (principle 2).

On a more general note, the findings of the fidelity assessment highlight the imperative of preserving small caseloads – which are widely recognised as a 'non-negotiable' attribute of Housing First<sup>30</sup> – if projects are to retain a high degree of fidelity to the core principles of the approach. Notably, whilst the Glasgow Pathfinder was designed to be a high fidelity service, staffing shortages have had a knock-on effect by curbing the extent to which staff can commit the time required to operationalise other principles, including the use of active engagement approaches (principle 5), supporting service users to identify their strengths and meet their goals and aspirations (principle 6), and promotion of harm reduction (principle 7). Further to this, the experience of providers working in rural areas indicate that caseloads of seven may be too high in rural contexts given the amount of time absorbed by travel.

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<sup>30</sup> Homeless Link (2020) *Developing Housing First: the 'non-negotiables'*. London: Homeless Link.

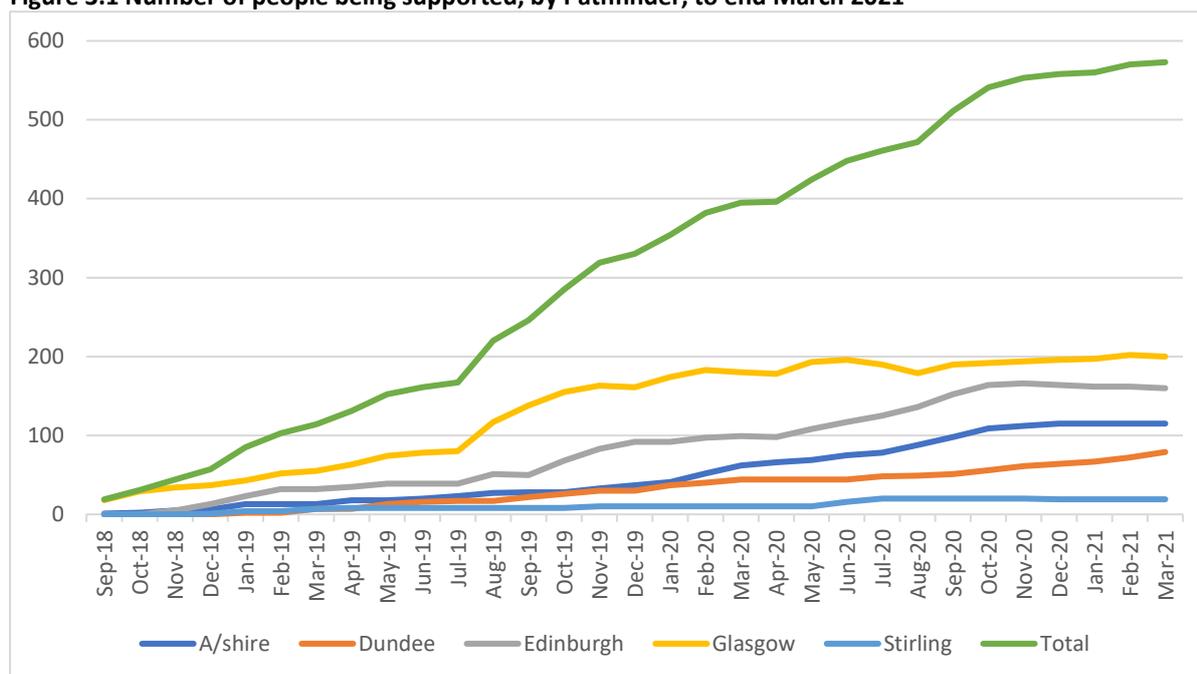
### 3. Numbers Housed, Preliminary Tenancy Sustainment Rates, and Unit Costs

Drawing upon tracker monitoring data and the Pathfinders’ quarterly financial returns, this chapter presents key figures regarding the number and characteristics of people being supported and housed, initial tenancy sustainment rates, and preliminary Pathfinder expenditure and unit costs.

#### 3.1 Number of people being supported and housed

Based on tracker monitoring data<sup>31</sup>, Figure 3.1 portrays the number of individuals receiving support from (that is, recruited to but not necessarily yet housed by) the Pathfinders. A full breakdown of these figures is also provided in tabular form in Appendix 1. Overall levels of recruitment were slower than had been anticipated, and were often intermittent, primarily as a result of staffing and capacity issues but also the effects of the pandemic. By the end of March 2021, that is, two years after the formal launch of the Pathfinder programme, a total of 573 individuals had been supported; of these, 200 were in Glasgow, 160 in Edinburgh, 115 in Aberdeen/shire, 79 in Dundee, and 19 in Stirling.

**Figure 3.1 Number of people being supported, by Pathfinder, to end March 2021**

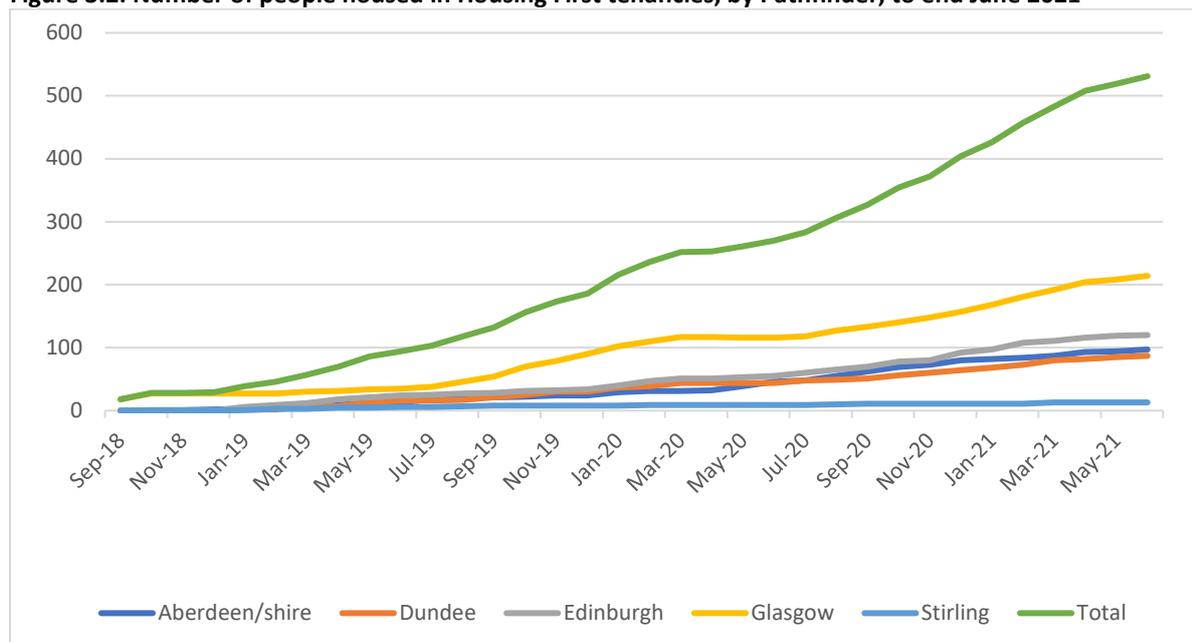


Source: Tracker monitoring data. Base: 531.

Figure 3.2 shows the numbers of people housed in independent Housing First tenancies up until the end of June 2021, at which point a total of 531 individuals had been housed. Of these, 214 were in Glasgow, 120 in Edinburgh, 97 in Aberdeen/shire, 87 in Dundee, and 13 in Stirling. The COVID-19 pandemic has also been highly disruptive, causing a lengthy hiatus in referrals and delaying tenancy allocations across all five areas from March 2020.

<sup>31</sup> These figures included data from the ‘tune up’ phase which pre-dated the formal Pathfinder launch in April 2019 (see Chapter 1). The Glasgow figures in both graphs include individuals being supported by the Pathfinder consortium led by Turning Point Scotland and the commissioned service led by The Salvation Army.

**Figure 3.2: Number of people housed in Housing First tenancies, by Pathfinder, to end June 2021**



Source: Tracker monitoring data. Base: 531.

Progress toward achieving tenancy targets at this interim point (end June 2021) was variable. The Dundee Pathfinder was closest, having achieved 87% of its target 100 tenancies, with Aberdeen/shire not far behind on 81% of its 120 target. The Glasgow Pathfinder had reached 68% of its 315 target and Stirling was two thirds of its way toward housing a target of 20 individuals. The Edinburgh Pathfinder was rather further behind, having achieved 44% of the original tenancy target.

It should be noted that targets regarding the number of individuals to be housed were based on property pledges made by housing providers prior to the formal establishment of the Pathfinder programme rather than a robust needs assessment in each area (albeit that some ‘mapping’ had already been done in Aberdeen/shire).

Miscommunication regarding the volume of pledges and ambition regarding the pace of scale-up within two Pathfinder areas had affected local levels of buy-in detrimentally given the presumption that local authorities would inevitably have to shoulder at least some (if not all) of the responsibility for funding the ongoing support of service users. The problems this presented diminished somewhat over subsequent months as relationships with key stakeholders, including key council representatives, were built (see s.4.1).

The source and nature of factors hindering the pace of scale-up has varied between different contexts and at different stages of programme development and delivery. Key examples have included difficulties recruiting staff (a particular problem in Edinburgh and Glasgow) (see s.4.2.1), challenges involved in streamlining referral and allocations processes (especially where attempts were made to integrate these with statutory systems, as was the case in Glasgow) (see s.4.1), and challenges in sourcing suitable housing in service users’ preferred locations (most clearly apparent in Edinburgh but also affecting other areas) (see s.4.4.1).

## 3.2 Demographic profile of service users

Tracker monitoring data provide some basic details regarding the key demographic characteristics of individuals being supported by the Pathfinders<sup>32</sup>. These indicate that at the time of writing two thirds (67%) of the individuals supported are male and one third (32%) female, with less than 1% identifying as transgender. In terms of age profile, 12% are aged 25 and under, 69% 26-49 years, 18% 50-64 years, and less than 1% 65 years or older. Virtually all are White British, with less than 1% of people providing these details identifying as being of either non-White ethnicity, or non-British nationality. Where data is recorded regarding service users' sexual orientation, this indicated that 96% identify as heterosexual, 2% as homosexual/gay, 1% as lesbian, and 1% as bisexual.

## 3.3 Tenancy sustainment

### 3.3.1 Tenancy sustainment rates

Table 3.1 portrays the tenancy sustainment rates<sup>33</sup> for individuals who had been housed by the Pathfinders for different periods of time, as recorded in tracker monitoring data at the end of June 2021. Key figures to note here are that 84% of the individuals who had been housed by the Pathfinder at least a year ago were still in a Housing First tenancy, and 82% of those housed at least two years ago were still in a Pathfinder tenancy. These preliminary 12-month and 24-month tenancy sustainment rates are commensurate with those reported internationally<sup>34</sup>.

**Table 3.1: Tenancy sustainment rates, by Pathfinder, to end June 2021**

Of those housed...	Aberdeen/shire (%)	Dundee (%)	Edinburgh (%)	Glasgow (%)	Stirling (%)	Total (%)
<6 months ago	100	100	96	98	100	98
6+ months ago	94	93	87	84	60	87
12+ months ago	89	90	84	83	60	84
24+ months ago	85	85	84	84	50	82

Source: Tracker monitoring data. Base: 531 (97 Aberdeen/shire, 87 Dundee, 120 Edinburgh, 214 Glasgow, 13 Stirling)

Tenancy sustainment figures to date have been relatively consistent across the Pathfinders, with the obvious exception of Stirling where the very small number of service users overall means that any change in the circumstances of just a few individuals has a dramatic effect on percentage figures (Table 3.1). Notably, the 24-month plus tenancy sustainment rate was either 84% or 85% in the other four Pathfinder areas, and 12-month plus rates ranged between 83% and 89% in the other four.

<sup>32</sup> Tracker records for service users' socio-demographic characteristics were incomplete at the time of writing. At the time of writing records were held regarding the gender of a total of 430 individuals, age of 436, ethnicity of 490, nationality of 408, and sexual orientation of 212.

<sup>33</sup> Individuals who had passed away after being housed by the Pathfinders have been excluded from the analysis of tenancy sustainment rates (as deaths should not be regarded as a 'failed tenancy'). Tenancy sustainment rates were calculated by dividing the number of individuals who were still housed in a Pathfinder Housing First tenancy (even if this was not their first such tenancy) by the total number of individuals who had been housed to date (excluding those who were deceased). The number of deaths, and repeat Housing First tenancies, are reported separately below.

<sup>34</sup> Mackie, P., Johnsen S. and Wood, J. (2017) *Ending Rough Sleeping: What works? An international evidence review*. London: Crisis.

More detailed tenancy sustainment figures for each Pathfinder and the programme as a whole are provided in Appendix 2. These indicate that an extremely small minority (6 individuals, representing 1% of the total number of people housed) had moved into a second Housing First tenancy after the first tenancy had not worked successfully for them; three of these were in Dundee, two in Edinburgh, and one in Glasgow. On this subject, one provider interviewee emphasised that *“moving home is okay, but becoming homeless is not”* (Provider, Edinburgh), and called for further consideration regarding how to facilitate moves between social rented tenancies where necessary without having to route an individual back through the homelessness system.

As Table 3.2 indicates, there were slight variations in tenancy sustainment rates between different tenures. At the end of June 2021, a total of 90% of all local authority tenancies had been sustained, as had 81% of all RSL tenancies. All (100%) of the minority of PRS tenancies (n=10) had all been sustained.

**Table 3.2: Tenancy sustainment by tenure, at end June 2021**

	LA	RSL	PRS	TOTAL
Total no. individuals housed	165	356	10	531
Total no. tenancies sustained	148	290	10	448
% of tenancies sustained	90	81	100	84

### 3.3.2 Reasons for tenancies ending

Table 3.3 provides an overview of the reasons underpinning ended tenancies as recorded in tracker data to the end of June 2021. Significantly, no evictions were recorded. On the issue of eviction, it must be noted that for much of the time period covered pandemic-related restrictions (of varying degrees) had been placed on social and private landlords’ ability to evict tenants, but evictions caused by antisocial behaviour or criminal activity continued to be permitted<sup>35</sup>.

A total of 7% of tenancies might be regarded as having ‘failed’, the reasons and outcomes for which were recorded as: planned moves to temporary homeless accommodation wherein an individual continued to receive Housing First support with a view to them being rehoused (affecting 4% of all tenants), planned move to supported accommodation (2% of tenants), and abandonment (2% of tenants). Further to this, tenancies had ended for a very small minority (2%) of all Pathfinder tenants due to a long-term prison sentence and 6% of all tenancies had ended due to the death of the tenant.

**Table 3.3: Reasons for tenancies ending, to end June 2021**

	Number	% (of all tenants)
<b>Tenancy not successfully sustained</b>		
• planned move to temporary homeless accommodation (still receiving HF support)	19	4
• abandonment	11	2
• planned move to supported accommodation	9	2
• eviction	0	0
<i>Total</i>	<i>39</i>	<i>7</i>

<sup>35</sup> Berry, K. (2021) *COVID-19: Support for Tenants and Landlords*. Edinburgh: Scottish Parliament.  
Fitzpatrick, S., Mackie, P., Pawson, H., Watts, B., and Wood, J. (2021) *The COVID-19 crisis response to homelessness in Great Britain: interim report*. Glasgow: CACHE.

End of tenancy for other reason		
• death of tenant	33	6
• long-term prison sentence	11	2
<i>Total</i>	<i>44</i>	<i>8</i>

Source: Tracker monitoring data. Base: 531.

When reflecting on the causes of ended tenancies, provider interviewees noted that in most cases abandonments or planned moves were attributed to service users being harassed or exploited by other people such as neighbours or drug network affiliates (see also s.4.6 below).

*One was the need to transfer an individual to [name of area] because they were being cuckooed by local drug gangs and, for their own safety, we had to move them out of the authority. (Pathfinder provider, Aberdeen/shire)*

*[With] two tenancies that have broken down ... both got themselves involved with local drug dealers, so at the end of the day, they had to flee ... We supported both service users to sign the tenancy back to ... the landlord, because that's the best outcome, rather than abandoning a tenancy ... We're just looking to get them other tenancies at the moment. (Frontline staff, Glasgow)*

Provider interviewees reported that in a small minority of cases, service users were supported to move into more appropriate supported accommodation when it became apparent that their support needs exceeded what Housing First was able to provide.

*[His] needs outweighed anything we could provide. He needed a care package as opposed to a support package, so we supported him into a different service, and then once settled we took a back step ... He's getting the right support, and I think that's what's come out of that, and you hope that at some point that is recognised. Because in terms of figures, that might look like a tenancy failure, but it absolutely wasn't, it was about us recognising he needs something more than we can give. (Provider, Dundee)*

When reflecting on the death of tenants, which had been recorded by all five Pathfinders<sup>36</sup>, provider interviewees noted that whilst at least some were known to have had serious health conditions, it is widely believed the majority (if not all) were in some way drug related. These very sad losses occurred in the context of an acknowledged 'drugs death crisis' in Scotland, wherein the drug related death rate has risen rapidly in recent years such that it is now the highest in Europe and more than three and a half times greater than that of the UK as a whole<sup>37</sup>. It was noted that in at least one area, changes in the supply of illicit drugs and therefore type and combination of substances consumed during the pandemic may have been a contributing factor to at least some deaths. One Pathfinder provider had reviewed the deaths locally and concluded that most of those individuals who had passed away had had a history of five or more previous overdoses, albeit that this information had not always been passed on to Pathfinder staff at the point of referral. There was consensus amongst provider and stakeholder interviewees that further reflection is needed regarding the causes and potential mitigations regarding drug-death related risk.

<sup>36</sup> Tracker monitoring data indicates that as at the end of June 2021, 14 tenant deaths had been recorded in Glasgow, 8 in Dundee, 6 in Edinburgh, 4 in Aberdeen/shire, and 1 in Stirling.

<sup>37</sup> National Records of Scotland (2021) *Drug-related Deaths in Scotland in 2020*. Edinburgh: NRS. <https://www.nrscotland.gov.uk/statistics-and-data/statistics/statistics-by-theme/vital-events/deaths/drug-related-deaths-in-scotland/2020>.

### 3.4 Expenditure and unit costs

This section presents data on the direct costs of delivering the Housing First Pathfinders, based on financial return data reported at 31 March 2021 (see s.1.2). It compares expenditures across the five Pathfinders and estimates the unit cost of service delivery. Cost data pertaining to Glasgow are limited to those provided by the Pathfinder consortium and do not include those for the commissioned service delivered by the Salvation Army (see s.2.4).

As is true of any such analysis, some caution is needed in interpreting the figures below. They include expenditures by Scotland's Housing First Pathfinders (and where relevant key partners) only, and exclude costs incurred by additional support services (e.g. physical and mental health services, drug and alcohol services), as well as potential savings in other public services. The figures also exclude rents, which are normally covered by Housing Benefits payments. Housing Benefit, as a transfer payment, is normally excluded from social cost benefit analysis, but may need to be considered when comparing the cost of Housing First to other forms of housing provision.

It should also be noted that average costs are likely to (continue to) change over time. Capital costs and initial set up costs mean that average costs per user can be expected to decline as projects scale up and user numbers increase, that is, as fixed costs are divided over a greater number of individuals. The ongoing cost of support for individual users will however accrue over time.

#### 3.4.1 Expenditures to date

Tables 3.4 and 3.5 provide a breakdown of costs for each of the Pathfinders, which totalled slightly more than £5.2 million by the end of March 2021. Staff costs account for 72% of overall expenditures to date, with implementation capital costs (particularly the cost of furnishing properties) amounting to 10% and running costs (IT, office costs, training, expenses, including capital and revenue costs) amounting to a combined 14%.

**Table 3.4: Breakdown of Pathfinder expenditures to March 2021**

	Aberdeen/shire	Dundee	Edinburgh	Glasgow	Stirling	Total
Staff costs	£642,367	£550,216	£1,341,105	£1,077,330	£120,398	£3,731,416
Running costs	£48,188	£43,641	£186,211	£156,647	£20,039	£454,727
Implementation capital costs	£85,121	£107,183	£181,194	£130,752	£26,500	£530,749
Project running capital costs	£18,022	£9,986	£191,401	£29,150	£1,000	£249,559
Monitoring, evaluation and learning	0	£6,000	£1,291	0	£2,250	£9,541
Management fees	£61,532	0	0	£137,591	0	£199,124
Other/unspecified	£62,231	£38,314				£38,314
<b>Total</b>	<b>£917,462</b>	<b>£755,340</b>	<b>£1,901,201</b>	<b>£1,531,471</b>	<b>£170,187</b>	<b>£5,275,661</b>

The Pathfinders have spent money in similar ways, with staff costs amounting to between 70% and 75% of total expenditures to date for each. Of the Pathfinders, Stirling has spent the largest share of its budget on furnishing properties, and Edinburgh on project running capital costs (e.g. IT hardware).

**Table 3.5: Breakdown of Pathfinder expenditures to March 2021 (%)**

	Aberdeen/shire	Dundee	Edinburgh	Glasgow	Stirling	Total
Staff costs	70%	73%	71%	70%	71%	72%
Running costs (office costs, training, expenses etc.)	5%	6%	10%	10%	12%	9%
Implementation capital costs (furnishing properties)	9%	14%	10%	9%	16%	10%
Project running capital costs (e.g. IT hardware)	2%	1%	10%	2%	1%	5%
Monitoring, evaluation and learning	0%	1%	0%	0%	1%	0%
Management fees	7%	0%	0%	9%	0%	4%
Other/unspecified	7%	5%	0%	0%	0%	1%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>

### 3.4.2 Unit costs of support provided

Unit costs have been calculated and presented in two ways: firstly, as average *cumulative* costs per person over the course of the Pathfinder programme to date; and secondly, as average *annual* costs per person. Additionally, costs calculations are presented both with and without key partner costs, that is, costs incurred by project and fund management delivered by Corra Foundation and Homeless Network Scotland, and the training provided by Turning Point Scotland.

#### *Cumulative costs per user*

The expenditures to date can be divided by the numbers of users of the Housing First service to calculate the average cost per person recruited to and supported by the Pathfinders, and the average cost per person housed. The results, presented as cumulative costs per service user to date, are given in Table 3.5.

**Table 3.5: Average cumulative unit costs per Housing First user, to date (31 March 2021)**

	Aberdeen/shire	Dundee	Edinburgh	Glasgow	Stirling	Total
Total Pathfinder expenditure to date	£920,229	£755,340	£1,901,201	£1,531,471	£170,187	<b>£5,213,430</b>
Number of people recruited/supported	115	79	160	124	19	<b>497</b>
Cost per person recruited/supported	£7,978	£9,561	£11,883	£12,351	£8,957	<b>£10,490</b>

Number of people housed	87	80	111	116	13	<b>407</b>
Cost per person housed	£10,546	£9,442	£17,128	£13,202	£13,091	<b>£12,962</b>

The average cumulative cost per person recruited to and supported by the Housing First Pathfinders is £10,615, while the average cost per person housed to date is £12,962. There is some variation between the Pathfinders, with highest unit costs in Edinburgh, Glasgow and Stirling, and lowest unit costs in Aberdeen and Dundee. There do not therefore appear to be economies of scale in service delivery at this point. The greatest differentials between unit costs per person housed and recruited are in Edinburgh and Stirling. The reasons underpinning such differentials will be investigated in further detail in the next interim report.

If the costs of delivery partners directly involved in delivering the Pathfinders (that is, Corra Foundation and Homeless Network Scotland as fund and project managers, and Turning Point Scotland as training provider) are included, the average cumulative cost to date per person supported across the five Pathfinders increases from £10,615 to £11,981 and the average cost per person housed from £12,962 to £14,631.

#### *Annual costs per user*

It is also possible to present the average annual costs of the service per person supported and per person housed. Table 3.6 presents data on the annual costs of service delivery of the Pathfinders only, and the Pathfinders plus delivery partners (that is, including fund and project management and training costs, as per above). Figures are given for the average number of people supported and housed over the year and at the year end.

**Table 3.6: Average annual unit cost per Housing First user, to date (31 March 2021)**

	Pathfinders only			Pathfinders and delivery partners		
Year	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
<b>Total costs</b>	<b>£348,971</b>	<b>£1,736,507</b>	<b>£3,195,581</b>	£549,971	£1,892,507	£3,517,581
<b>Annual user numbers</b>						
<b>Number supported</b>						
Average over year	36	177	380	36	177	380
At year end	80	276	418	80	276	418
<b>Number housed</b>						
Average over year	9	85	207	9	85	207
At year end	27	135	291	27	135	291
<b>Average annual cost</b>						
<b>Per person supported:</b>						
Average over year	£9,655	£9,820	£8,413	£15,217	£10,702	£9,261
At year end	£4,362	£6,292	£7,645	£6,875	£6,857	£8,415
<b>Per person housed:</b>						
Average over year	£39,400	£20,510	£15,444	£62,094	£22,352	£17,000
At year end	£12,925	£12,863	£10,981	£20,369	£14,019	£12,088

This indicates that when costs to Pathfinders (only) are considered, the average annual unit cost at 2020/21 year end was £10,981 per person housed (or £7,645 per person supported). If key partner costs (including fund and project management and training) are included, the average annual unit cost at 2020/21 year end was £12,088 per person housed (or £8,415 per person supported).

The average cost per person housed has declined dramatically over the three years to date, because of initial set-up costs and time lags between incurring expenditures and securing housing outcomes. In all cases, these time lags mean that unit costs based on average numbers of service users over the year are higher than the unit costs of users at the year end, as numbers supported and housed increase over the course of the year.

### 3.5 Conclusion

Scotland's Housing First Pathfinder has successfully scaled up Housing First provision such that 531 individuals with multiple and complex needs had been allocated a tenancy by the end of June 2021. At the time of writing, two thirds (67%) of the individuals housed were men and one third (32%) women, with less than 1% identifying as transgender. In terms of age profile, 12% were aged 25 and under, 69% 26-49 years, 18% 50-64 years, and less than 1% 65 years or older. Almost all (99%) were White British and the vast majority (96%) identified as heterosexual.

The Pathfinders have been highly effective at supporting people to sustain their tenancies to date, achieving an overall 12-month tenancy sustainment rate of 84% and 24-month tenancy sustainment rate of 82%. Notably, no evictions have been recorded to date. The tenancy sustainment rates were relatively consistent across the Pathfinders, the smallest (Stirling, which has housed 13 people to date) excepted. These tenancy sustainment levels are commensurate with those reported internationally, despite the Pathfinders having operated in the context of a global pandemic for more than a year.

Slightly more than £5million had been spent on Pathfinder delivery (excluding partner costs) by the end of March 2021. Staff costs have accounted for 72% of overall expenditures to date, with implementation capital costs (particularly the cost of furnishing properties) amounting to 10% and running costs (IT, office costs, training, expenses, including capital and revenue costs) amounting to a combined 14%.

When direct costs to Pathfinders (only) are considered, the average annual unit cost at 2020/21 year end was £10,981 per person housed (and £7,645 per person supported). If key partner costs (covering fund and project management and training) are included, the average annual unit cost at 2020/21 year end was £12,088 per person housed (or £8,415 per person supported).

## 4. Operational Challenges and Lessons Learned

The chapter documents the key challenges and lessons learned during the design, mobilisation and early stages of Pathfinder delivery. It opens with reflections regarding the nature and impact of different consortia composition and partnership arrangements. This is followed by discussion of issues relating to: staffing, referral and risk assessment, sourcing and furnishings homes, support delivery, responses to antisocial behaviour, and views regarding the preservation of programme fidelity going forward.

### 4.1 Consortia composition and partnerships

As the Pathfinder descriptions in Chapter 2 indicate, the size and composition of consortia varied substantially, ranging from just two voluntary sector providers (which subsequently merged) in Stirling to seven in Edinburgh. Key benefits of larger consortia were identified as fostering knowledge exchange between staff of agencies with different specialist expertise and embedding a Housing First ethos across multiple organisations. An additional potential benefit was capacity to match service users with providers based on the former's needs and latter's particular expertise, but that this had not been realised fully in practice given that providers came on board in tranches (albeit that all young people had been supported by the Rock Trust). The drawbacks of large consortia identified by interviewees included uncertainty regarding who external stakeholders should contact when issues arose, and challenges involved in reconciling different organisational pay grades, working cultures, and performance management processes (see also s.4.2.1). Smaller consortia presented less opportunity for benefiting from shared learning or engendering culture change across multiple partners, but were generally able to mobilise more quickly.

The involvement of statutory bodies from an early stage in programme development was widely regarded as highly beneficial but, where pursued, had also presented a number of key challenges. The inclusion of Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire Councils as formal members the Aberdeen/shire Pathfinder consortium, for example, was reported to have facilitated buy-in at the strategic level by other statutory services and catalysed conversations about systems change.

*We ... have local authority representation at the table, and we have health and social care representation at the table. That's been a great strength ... It brings its complexities and it brings its problems, but I'd rather have those than not have them at the table ... [My advice to others setting up Housing First would be] don't be scared to test processes, even if it does challenge the statutory players at the table. Try and bring them into that process so they acknowledge that they're part of that change process. (Provider, Aberdeen/shire)*

The partnership between the Glasgow Pathfinder consortium and Glasgow City HSCP had had a similar effect on strategic-level buy-in across health and social care sectors. These positive developments had not necessarily filtered down to the frontline and translated into more 'open doors' for the individuals being supported 'on the ground' in either context, however (see s.4.5.5).

Provider and stakeholder interviewees emphasised that the establishment of these kinds of relationships between statutory and voluntary sectors and any associated attempts to integrate systems (e.g. referral and risk assessment, see s.4.3), whilst desirable on a number of fronts, can slow down the process of mobilisation substantially, especially in complex local systems involving a large number of potential stakeholders.

*Consensus is brilliant ... The reality is that slows things down ... For Housing First, you've almost got this triangle of statutory duty - local authorities, HSCPs... You've got housing providers and you've got care providers, and all sitting with different regulatory requirements ... I think that that - partnerships and working together – brilliant, key strengths, bring them together. The reality is sometimes it slows things down ... You mobilise a bit slower. (Stakeholder, Glasgow)*

The fact that some of the tools used by statutory bodies do not reflect Housing First's strength-based philosophy presents a further challenge to attempts to embed Housing First within existing systems, as was noted in Glasgow when the Pathfinder adopted the forms used by the HSCP when rehousing Clyde Place hostel residents via the commissioned Housing First service, for example (see s.2.4). These assessments were noted to be deficit- and needs-focused and thereby poorly placed to prompt user-led conversations about individual strengths, goals, and/or aspirations.

On a related point, a number of interviewees highlighted the need for further reflection regarding the different legal duties that statutory bodies have toward members of the target population when developing such partnerships and/or attempting to integrate systems.

*[We need to work out], how does this knit in with statutory arrangements for people? ... Social workers work to a far more robust set of legal requirements than we do. We might say, 'It's okay if somebody disengages.' For them, it might be really not okay ... [because] they're under an adult-protection situation or something. I think, yes, we should have looked at that ... We're getting there but, as I say, it's happened the wrong way around. (Provider, Edinburgh)*

It was uniformly agreed that greater involvement of housing providers from the point of programme development would have been beneficial. The same was said to be true of health and criminal justice sector input during programme design and mobilisation stages.

*I think in terms of lessons learned, if I was doing it again it could be argued before we make any commitment, let's bring everyone to the table and have everyone, a joined-up approach to how it's going to be mainstreamed looking ahead ... I would say, quite strongly, to people doing it in other parts of the country, have that buy-in ... from housing providers ... but also have the buy-in of health and social care, criminal justice, at a very early stage and get their commitment to funding up front. (Stakeholder, Edinburgh)*

*Partnership working is a huge one ... You need to have your partners ready. They need to be ready to go, and bought into the service from the get-go, because if not, then it's a bit more of a struggle (Provider, Aberdeen/shire)*

In reflecting on the process of programme design and mobilisation, many providers and stakeholders emphasised that the amount of time absorbed in establishing relationships, and gaining consensus regarding and communicating the roles and responsibilities of each partner, should not be underestimated. Some felt that insufficient time had been committed to this stage in programme development and advised that it should not be rushed as Housing First is rolled out more widely.

*You absolutely need the landlord at the table for discussions, and there needs to be a very shared understanding across housing providers ... Whether that's PRS or RSLs. There needs to be a clear understanding between the care provider, the*

*housing provider and the local authority - or the referral pathways - about who does what when, [and] timescales we expect to work within... (Provider, Stirling)*

It was uniformly agreed that the Scottish Government's public expression of support for Housing First as an approach had been a key enabler in the development and mobilisation of Housing First within the Pathfinder areas. Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan (RRTP) requirements and the obvious 'fit' of Housing First with an increased focus on housing-led approaches were also seen as key facilitators fostering local buy-in across sectors.

*There's been a real commitment from Scottish Government ... There's been a real commitment that this is what we're going to be doing ... I think that seems to have filtered down. Not necessarily all the way down, but far enough down for the wheels to start to change. I think because of that coming down from the top there has been local buy-in. (Stakeholder, Dundee)*

On a broader point, a few interviewees noted that the Pathfinder had had a 'ripple effect', wherein the provider and/or other stakeholders had attempted to integrate at least some of the key principles of Housing First, especially as regards the flexibility and lesser conditionality of support, into their wider practice.

*I think what's also been good ... is that across the city, all the providers who have support officers, we've all upped our game to incorporate some of Housing First's principles. That's a real strength, and I think it will mean that our support work is much more ... goes-the-extra-mile than perhaps we've done in the past. (Provider, Dundee)*

## 4.2 Staff recruitment, training and support

### 4.2.1 Staff recruitment

In the early stages of project mobilisation Pathfinders were staffed predominantly or entirely via secondments or internal transfers amongst consortia partners. All, with the exception of the Stirling Pathfinder, recruited externally as they began to scale up. Difficulty recruiting in some areas delayed this process, most notably in Glasgow and to a slightly lesser extent Edinburgh. These difficulties were widely attributed to the relatively low levels of pay being offered and competition with other health and social care services recruiting at the same time (many of which were in the statutory sector and offered higher salaries).

*I don't think the pay scales help. I think the pay scales are too low ... I think for the skillset that you're looking for, you need to pay ... I do think if you're expecting people to have the right skills, you need to reward that. I remember speaking to a social worker that would've been perfect for this, and [they said] 'I'm not going for that pay.' (Provider, Aberdeen/shire)*

Differences in staff pay and conditions between providers had presented a further challenge for some Pathfinder consortia.

*I think that Housing First needs to look at how we can apply a consistent salary which is commensurate with the type of work ... The risk is with the large consortium providers is we have people dot about providers based on salary. (Provider, Aberdeen/shire)*

*Everybody's got different terms and conditions ... there's issues about mileage amounts and pensions and holidays, and all these things, which are on a day-to-day level, problematic sometimes, and cause staff friction where ideally, you would like none. (Provider, Dundee)*

Concerns regarding the impacts on staff recruitment and retention prompted the commissioning of a salary benchmarking exercise by Homeless Network Scotland. This identified tangible differences in salaries for similar positions as the greatest contributing factor for staff moving between employers. It concluded that the consortia had in the main generated a commonality within given Pathfinders in terms of delivery roles and salary banding, but that this had been offset somewhat by virtue of the fact that the larger organisations deliver services across Scotland and had to take cognisance of how Housing First delivery roles sit against existing positions within housing support provision or other health and social care support roles.

The salary benchmarking exercise highlighted three areas that should be considered in future commissioning rounds of Housing First. First, it notes that these both quality and quantity determinants should be taken account of, given risks that 'fixed' total caseloads and weighted scoring relating to price may drive down costs and keep salaries low, whilst a model that enables wide salary variation may deter third sector organisations delivering a wide range of services within different sectors from becoming involved. Second, it would be extremely difficult for third sector organisations to compete and retain staff if third sector provision sits alongside public sector delivery of Housing First. Third, a fixed salary banding within future commissioning processes would be difficult to achieve given the disparate nature and composition of third sector and associated providers. On this latter point, it was noted that in order to create a more equitable 'playing field' commissioners may wish to consider reviewing future bidding consortia organisations in terms of their approach to pay, fair work, and ability to recruit and retain staff.

On the issue of staff salaries, a number of interviewees emphasised that the role of Housing First worker is a challenging one which requires a specialist skillset. Some called for the role to be valued more highly and recompensed sufficiently that it becomes a 'destination' role for the most skilled and committed individuals. This, it was argued, would make it easier to recruit and retain the highest calibre staff:

*It's important to find the right calibre of staff for Housing First. You're working with some of the most complex individuals who are living in really challenging circumstances, particularly in the city. It is people that are rough sleeping. It is people that go off the radar for weeks at a time, so you're really looking for that assertive resilient staff member that's going to keep going back again and again, even if they're getting told to beat it in no uncertain terms. For us, it wasn't just about feet in the door, it was about finding the right calibre of staff and the right skill mix... (Provider, Edinburgh)*

*It would be good if we drive up the salaries and terms and conditions of people that do this kind of job. I think I'd describe it ... almost like Housing First being a ... destination profession for people. Identifying that this is beyond a general support work role, and that we want people with good experience in those roles. We expect it to be [rather than] a promoted role, a natural move-on for people that are really skilled ... and passionate about homelessness, rather than people that are drifting in and out of support jobs... (Provider, Aberdeen/shire)*

Previous experience of supporting individuals with multiple and complex needs was widely reported by provider interviewees to be highly beneficial, and some even argued essential, as a prerequisite for staff. Some interviewees did however note that having values that align with the principles of Housing First were equally if not more important as staff attributes. On this latter point, a few providers noted that some staff members who had previously worked in traditional hostel keyworker or floating support roles had found the transition to working with the flexibility required by Housing First difficult, with one going as far as to suggest that some staff members had been 'institutionalised' by the mainstream hostel system.

*I firmly believe that for Housing First to really work, you really need experienced, resilient workers that are going to be able to go back and back. Have that respectfully persistent approach to support, because you're going to be working with people who do have complex needs... (Provider, Stirling)*

*As much as experience is really appealing, also making sure that we're not recruiting people with bad habits, or not bad habits, but ingrained habits. It's very difficult, if you've worked on a visiting support service for years ... not to continue to approach the work in that way. We're asking people to do things differently ... Its quite hard to undo some of that stuff ... It's the idea of real values-based recruitment. (Provider, Edinburgh)*

On this issue it is worth noting that whilst a few frontline staff focus group participants reported finding the transition to Housing First's flexible and relatively unconditional approach to support delivery challenging – and providers confirmed that a few secondees had requested a return to their original posts – many more staff interviewees explained that it had felt like something of a 'relief' to be able to support individuals in a flexible way that felt to them more intuitively 'right' and they believed was far more effective than traditional approaches when supporting people with complex needs.

More generally, provider interviewees emphasised that there was substantial value in recruiting support workers with experience of working in other sectors (e.g. health and criminal justice) and/or of supporting specific subpopulations (e.g. women, young people, survivors of sexual violence etc.).

Peer workers were included within the Glasgow Pathfinder's staff team from an early stage in programme delivery, building upon Turning Point Scotland's pre-existing experience in its legacy Housing First project. Recruitment to peer worker posts had also been challenging, with no appointments made in the first recruitment round. Plans regarding the incorporation of peer mentors or peer workers with lived experience were still in an early stage of development at the point of fieldwork in others (including Dundee and Aberdeen/shire, for example).

#### 4.2.2 Staff training and support

All staff have all been given access to the training provided by Turning Point Scotland's Housing First Academy Training Hub<sup>38</sup>, supported by Pathfinder funding, which offers tailored courses for managers and frontline practitioners covering Housing First principles and their translation into practice. Frontline staff interviewees reflected that this training had been highly beneficial in ensuring that they fully understood the principles of the Housing First approach and implications for day-to-day support delivery.

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<sup>38</sup> The Training Hub's website provides full details regarding the courses provided: <https://www.housingfirstacademy.com/training-hub>.

All providers also offered in-house training on a vast array of subjects pertaining to the support of people with multiple and complex needs, as well as organisational policies and procedures. Access to externally provided training on relevant issues was also provided, covering issues such as welfare benefits, housing legislation, harm reduction, psychologically informed environments, trauma informed care, and naloxone use, amongst many others.

Staff interviewees reported feeling sufficiently well trained to fulfil their responsibilities. A few did nevertheless note that they thought they would benefit from additional training, including in the areas of responding to mental health crises and the prevention of and responses to poor door management (sometimes referred to as 'gatekeeping') by those Housing First tenants vulnerable to exploitation (see s.4.6).

On the issue of external training, one stakeholder interviewee representing the health sector urged Housing First to "avoid reinventing the wheel", but rather to make use of existing training available in allied sectors insofar as is appropriate and feasible. It was noted that much of the training offered by HSCPs/IJBs, for example, would be highly relevant to frontline Housing First practitioners.

The importance of supporting frontline staff adequately was emphasised by provider and frontline staff interviewees across all five Pathfinders, in recognition of the challenges and pressures that frontline staff face on a day-to-day basis. All offered regular formal supervision sessions, as well as informal opportunities for staff to de-brief. In Dundee, a 'decompression' hour, enabling staff to reflect on their practice as well as discuss practicalities, was scheduled at the end of each day in the early stages of Pathfinder delivery; this had been appreciated by frontline staff and was missed when discontinued.

*The things that we're dealing with every day, we need that reflection with our colleagues ... we all benefit from that ... it's a pivotal part of what we do for us as staff members to be looked after, it's very important ... [Reflective sessions] save you taking the stuff home, you know what I mean? (Frontline staff, Dundee)*

The physical co-location of consortium Housing First staff (pre-COVID), as in the Glasgow Pathfinder office for example, was said to have fostered the informal exchange of information and mutual support between workers, albeit that this was circumscribed by remote working during the pandemic. Some Pathfinders had instigated informal videoconference 'catch-ups' and/or created staff WhatsApp groups to ensure that staff had opportunities to benefit from peer support when working remotely. A few staff interviewees noted that they would welcome more opportunity to share experiences with other Housing First workers within and beyond their own Pathfinder area, with the caveat that finding time to do so would be difficult given the demands (and at times unpredictability) of their role.

Where used (in Edinburgh and Glasgow, for example), formal reflective practice sessions facilitated by external professionals such as clinical psychologists were reported to be extremely worthwhile. In Edinburgh, Pathfinder staff have also had access to clinical supervision from a consultant psychologist. Together, these had provided valuable opportunities for staff to reflect on their practice and safeguard their wellbeing. These provisions were deemed invaluable given recognition of the challenges associated with the Housing First support worker role, including the very real risk of exposure to vicarious trauma and/or potential burnout<sup>39</sup>.

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<sup>39</sup> Theodorou, N., Johnsen, S., Watts, B. and Burley, A. (2021) Improving multiple exclusion homelessness services: frontline worker responses to insecure attachment styles. *Journal of Mental Health Training, Education and Practice*, ahead of print <https://doi.org/10.1108/JMHTEP-02-2021-0016>.

### 4.3 Referral and risk assessment

A number of challenges were encountered, lessons learned and adaptations made as regards referral processes. All Pathfinder providers reporting having received 'inappropriate' referrals, particularly in the earliest stages of programme mobilisation. In these cases, the individuals referred were either: not homeless, had low level support needs (i.e. did not require Housing First), had extremely high support needs (i.e. required a level of care that Housing First cannot provide), or did not want Housing First (at the point they had been referred, at least). Some referrals were also said to be based on limited, poor quality and/or outdated intelligence regarding the characteristics and circumstances of the individual being referred.

*At the start we were getting quite a number of inappropriate referrals ... in terms of not enough information, or the people have already got tenancies but they're referring to us thinking we're more just a support agency that can step in. (Frontline staff, Dundee)*

*We sometimes get inappropriate referrals. We get referrals for people who aren't homeless or people that actually don't need that intense level of support. (Provider, Aberdeen/shire)*

*We're transitioning a couple of cases at the moment over into other services, because their needs are ... superseding the Housing First support services that we can provide ... people with cognitive impairment and maybe ARBD [alcohol related brain damage]. (Frontline staff, Glasgow)*

*Housing First, without a doubt, will not help everybody. We already have people with [name of service] we're working with and we can't refer to Housing First, because ... the person doesn't even want it. (Stakeholder, Edinburgh)*

These problems were generally attributed to an initial lack of clarity regarding eligibility criteria and/or referral agents' limited understanding of what Housing First does (and does not do). On this issue it was often noted that even where buy-in to Housing First had been secured from housing providers at strategic level, this had not always filtered down to frontline housing officers who are making referrals.

*I find that there's no knowledge feeding from the top from the housing providers down to the grassroots workers as to what Housing First is and what the role of the Housing First workers is ... There's a bit of conflict in their understanding of the roles ... I think that's a major stumbling block I would say. (Frontline staff, Aberdeen/shire)*

Where these issues had been encountered, eligibility criteria were refined, screening tools adopted (if not already used), and additional effort invested in communicating Housing First characteristics and referral procedures to referring agencies. These developments were widely agreed to have improved the appropriateness and quality of referrals considerably. With the benefit of hindsight a few provider interviewees reflected that taking more time to develop referral pathways in liaison with key stakeholders, and to ensure that relevant details are communicated to frontline staff in referring agencies as well as those in senior management roles, would have been time well invested.

*If I was setting something similar up, I would be very clear about, 'Right, let's get around the table and thrash this out, so that we've got a clear referral pathway, assessment tool, and plan' so that we can communicate that to everybody at the point of the project starting. (Provider, Stirling)*

All five Pathfinders target the population traditionally supported by Housing First programmes, that being homeless people with multiple and complex needs who have often experienced long-term or repeat homelessness. Some, most notably Edinburgh and Aberdeen/shire, also include an element focussing on provision for young people via Housing First for Youth ('HF4Y'), albeit that this was still at a relatively early stage of development at the point of fieldwork<sup>40</sup>.

A small number of stakeholder interviewees queried whether some individuals accepted onto some Pathfinders – particularly in the earliest stages when pressure to scale up had felt at its most intense – had the level or complexity of support needs requiring Housing First. By the end of the first year of operation the general consensus nevertheless was that, that handful of early cases excepted, the Pathfinders were generally recruiting the 'right' people.

*It's targeting the right people; the right people are getting it and up to now, touch wood, I personally see it as a success. (Stakeholder, Edinburgh)*

*We have been dealing with people who have been sleeping rough. Every single one of our clients has not had a secure tenancy status for at least five years or more, so it's definitely the right demographic. (Provider, Edinburgh)*

In most contexts, some individuals did not know that they had been referred to Housing First, and staff interviewees reported that was a source of confusion for individuals targeted (see also s.5.3). The uptake of Housing First offers was said to be generally higher amongst individuals who knew they had been referred than those who did not.

A number of staff interviewees emphasised the importance of 'doing things right' during initial meetings with individuals who had been referred. Some noted that three-way meetings involving referral agents were beneficial where the potential service users had a positive relationship with the person who had referred them.

*The first initial meeting and conversation that we have the person being referred, is something that we can't get back, so we'll do our best to make that a really positive meeting. On a personal level, I tend to try and leave as much paperwork as I can behind me, leave behind the formal language that we would have to use, and just have a pretty honest to goodness conversation about how Housing First could be of benefit to that person, and what that process is going to look like for them. (Frontline staff, Stirling)*

On a less positive note, the experience of one person compelled to accept an offer of Housing First very early on emphasises the critical importance of ensuring that individuals genuinely want an independent tenancy before recruiting them to Housing First.

*So we had one guy, he said, 'I don't want to be Housing First, I don't want my own tenancy, I wouldn't be able to manage it.' We had a wee think about, you're going to have support .... and your own furniture package, and you'll be able to get help to manage your bills and your things ... If I'm honest, I think we pushed the guy*

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<sup>40</sup> Key learning from the HF4Y programmes will be documented in future evaluation outputs.

*into it ... It happened very quickly, he stopped living there and he went back to rough sleeping, and we could not get him to return to that property ... We pushed him forward, really, because of political pressure and a misunderstanding around Housing First. (Stakeholder, Glasgow)*

With the exception of the Dundee Pathfinder which had developed its own screening tool (see s.2.2), all others used the New Directions Team (NDT) tool to assess and/or prioritise referrals. The NDT was generally considered to provide a helpful indication of the multiplicity of an individual's needs, albeit that it does not necessarily convey how debilitating any single issue might be for the individual concerned. The tool was generally employed quite flexibly, and some interviewees emphasised that there is utility in allowing referral agents to 'make a case' for an individual if that person does not score highly on the NDT but Housing First would be an appropriate intervention for them.

*It's [the NDT is] a good enough tool. It's not perfect, but it's good enough as a measure in the absence of anything else. (Provider, Glasgow)*

*We use the NDT tool, which I think a majority of Pathfinders use, and that was really useful because I think the difficulty we had at the beginning was, 'Well, who takes priority?' You could perhaps have three agencies, saying, 'Well, no I think this person really needs it and this person really needs it.' That really helps. (Provider, Stirling)*

In Edinburgh, the NDT was modified to give greater priority to rough sleepers in early stages of delivery, and consideration was being given to the potential of differentially weighting other areas as different groups are prioritised going forward. One interviewee noted that young people tended to score lower on the NDT's engagement and substance misuse criteria given the lesser time they had had to become disillusioned with services and/or to develop chronic substance misuse or mental health problems, hence cautioned that this should be borne in mind when interpreting overall NDT scores.

The length and complexity of the referral process were seen as being problematic in some areas. This was most notable in Glasgow during the early stages of mobilisation, when long delays in getting referrals assessed via the HSCP were reported to be very demoralising for some of the individuals referred. The process sped up considerably after the Glasgow Pathfinder consortium took on some responsibility for processing referrals but was subsequently suspended temporarily due to staff shortages (see s.2.4), thereby highlighting a tendency for the cause and location of some implementational 'sticking points' to shift over time. A number of providers in other areas also expressed a wish for their referral processes to be expedited, advocating for the more frequent meeting of assessment panels, for example, to reduce the time that individuals referred had to wait for decisions regarding their acceptance onto Housing First.

A key lesson learned has been that there is significant value in multi-agency input into the assessment of referrals given the intelligence regarding individual cases that different stakeholders can bring to the table, but also that Housing First support providers should be integrally involved in these assessments. The presence of Housing First providers acts as a safeguard against the acceptance of inappropriate referrals (of people who lack capacity to comprehend the consequences of failing to adhere to a standard tenancy agreement, for example). Equally, input from Housing First providers in referral assessments can guard against the potential rejection of applications on grounds of risk aversion and/or assumptions regarding a lack of 'housing readiness' or need for 'a period of stability' with regards to substance use or mental health – all of which were reported to have had been an issue in Glasgow during the early stages of mobilisation.

On the issue of risk, the application of a ‘social work lens’ to statutory duty and risk was deemed to have contributed to a particularly low level of ‘risk appetite’ amongst some stakeholders in Glasgow. Significantly, this was coupled with a lack of consensus between various stakeholders – including but not limited to voluntary sector Pathfinder consortia members, RSLs, and the HSCP – regarding whether and where particular risks should be shouldered and/or where responsibility would lie if anything were to ‘go wrong’ with individual cases. At the point of fieldwork, plans were in place for stakeholders in Glasgow to co-design an approach to risk assessment and management going forward which took due account of the full range of the concerns and duties of, and challenges faced by, all relevant (statutory and non-statutory) parties.

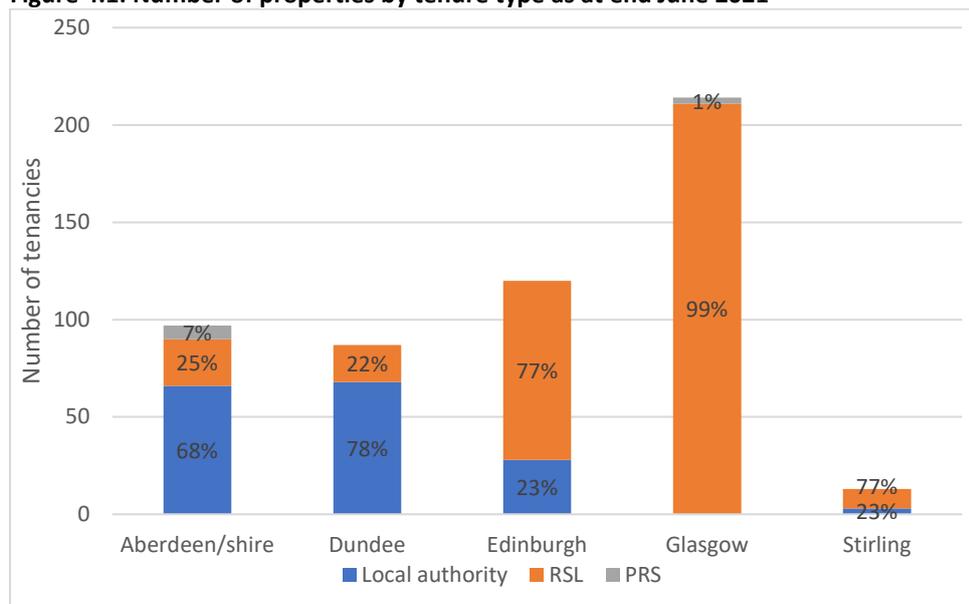
Across the Pathfinders, initial risk assessments were typically conducted at the point of referral, and further developed in consultation with service users, often with the aid of tools such as the Outcomes Star Risk Reader. Several provider interviewees emphasised the importance of seeking and taking account of intelligence provided by other stakeholders (e.g. social workers), when developing risk assessments. Risk assessments were universally considered ‘fluid’, with frontline staff interviewees emphasising the importance of these being updated very regularly, including when service users began to disclose previously undocumented risks as their levels of trust in support workers developed.

## 4.4 Sourcing and furnishing homes

### 4.4.1 Sourcing properties

By the end of June 2021, almost all the Pathfinder tenancies had been allocated a social tenancy, with a total of 67% of all tenancies being in RSL properties, 31% local authority housing, and only 2% being housed in the PRS. The balance of RSL to council tenancies has varied significantly depending on the characteristics of local housing markets, as shown in Figure 4.1. The Aberdeen/shire and Dundee Pathfinders have predominantly used council housing (68% and 78% of all tenants respectively), with the most or all other service users being accommodated in RSL tenancies (25% and 22% respectively). The balance of tenure types has been the reverse in Edinburgh and Stirling wherein both Pathfinders have housed approximately three quarters (77%) of the people they support in RSL properties and approximately one quarter (23%) in council tenancies. Only the Aberdeen/shire and Glasgow Pathfinders have used PRS housing, and then only for a minority of service users (7% and 1% respectively).

**Figure 4.1: Number of properties by tenure type as at end June 2021**



Source: Tracker monitoring data.

A shortage of suitable properties was almost universally regarded as a key challenge for the Pathfinders, albeit that this had presented a greater problem in some areas than others, with pressure reported to be especially acute in Edinburgh. This issue was widely identified as the primary cause of the long delays between recruitment to Housing First and allocation of housing experienced by many Pathfinder clients. These delays had been exacerbated by the pandemic, especially during the early lockdowns when there was a hiatus in property allocations and reduced levels of property turnover resulting from the eviction moratorium<sup>41</sup>. Tracker monitoring data indicate that as at the end of June 2021 the average length of time between an individual being recruited to a Pathfinder and moving into a tenancy was 172 days. The lengths of time individuals had to wait on average varied between Pathfinders, being highest in Edinburgh (219 days), followed by Aberdeen/shire (176 days), Glasgow (153 days), Dundee (153 days), and Stirling (126 days). Service users were always offered temporary accommodation in the interim period on harm minimisation grounds.

A shortage of one-bed social housing properties in areas that service users wanted to live was identified as a perennial problem by many interviewees. Where two-bedroom properties had been sourced, Discretionary Housing Payments (DHPs) had been used to avoid incurring the 'bedroom tax', albeit that this raised some concerns regarding long-term affordability given their discretionary nature.

*The biggest problem we've got is, we've got the wrong type of houses now, the wrong size of houses and the wrong locations really. So about 60 per cent now of all homeless applications and housing applications are for single people ... there's an oversupply of two-bedroomed accommodation... So there has to be a level of understanding and expectation about what we can and cannot achieve. (Provider, Aberdeen/shire)*

<sup>41</sup> Berry, K. (2021) *COVID-19: Support for Tenants and Landlords*. Edinburgh: Scottish Parliament.  
Fitzpatrick, S., Mackie, P., Pawson, H., Watts, B., and Wood, J. (2021) *The COVID-19 crisis response to homelessness in Great Britain: interim report*. Glasgow: CACHE.

Difficulties sourcing suitably adapted properties for tenants with disabilities have been extremely problematic in some Pathfinder areas (e.g. Glasgow).

As noted above, PRS housing has not been used by some Pathfinders at all, and it has only been accessed to a very limited extent by others, given concerns about affordability. That said, PRS use was being considered in Dundee given recognition that this would increase potential for service users to source properties in the city centre where the council has very little stock. In Aberdeen (city), some private landlords had negotiated rent levels so that they did not exceed LHA rates rather than leave a property empty, but the long-term sustainability of these arrangements is not guaranteed.

*The private sector is so blooming inaccessible and unaffordable for people. I think we'd end up having people in a situation where they were in properties that they wouldn't be able to afford to live in. (Provider, Edinburgh)*

*The general private sector is prohibitive because of the price still, especially in Aberdeen. They say it's not and now the oil boom's gone and all the rest of it, but they're used to those high rents here. So they still expect it and they are higher than what Universal Credit will pay. (Provider, Aberdeen/shire)*

The issue of affordability aside, a key challenge identified by interviewees is the need to balance: a) maximisation of user choice, with b) minimisation of risk (to both service users and their neighbours), and c) time taken to source housing. Frontline staff interviewees spoke at length about the importance of assisting service users to make informed choices which take account of factors such as the availability of housing in particular areas, neighbourhood reputations as regards the prevalence of anti-social behaviour, and/or the residential locations of peers they are known to have to have had problematic relationships with.

*It is about having honest conversations with people to say, actually, if you choose just that area that you want to live in, you're going to be sitting in your current position for a long, long time because nothing's going to come up. People do have choice absolutely, but it's also about realistic choices for me, if that makes sense. (Frontline staff, Stirling)*

*I think it's a double-edged sword. If you want to give choice, and part of the whole ethos of Housing First is that you're given choice. That's right that we do that, but at the same time if we're moving too many people into one area, then are we providing difficulties within that area? Is there going to be a backlash from the neighbourhood itself, from the community around our clients? We don't want that either, so it's finding that fine balance of yes, just making sure that we're trying to give as much choice as we can. (Provider, Edinburgh)*

Many Pathfinder and housing provider interviewees emphasised the importance of ensuring insofar as possible that Housing First tenants were not concentrated in any particular location(s). This aim was however proving difficult to achieve in practice, most notably in Edinburgh where service users were bidding via the choice-based EdIndex lettings system (see s.2.3). Concerns regarding concentrations focused on elevated risks to service users, disproportionate burden on housing providers with stock in popular (especially city centre) locations, and/or increased potential for Housing First clients to be competing against one another for the same properties.

*The ... unintended consequences of giving people one bedroom properties in the city centre because that's what they're bidding for means that certain housing associations are having to take a greater share of the problem because that's where they've got their stock. (Stakeholder, Edinburgh)*

*We know that Housing First works best when ... people aren't all congregated in one area, but ... we've got five or six people in the same area. That's not the best thing for the community and it's not the best thing for individuals in that area. (Stakeholder, Edinburgh)*

*The idea that housing is pepper potted around the city; it's quite difficult if people are bidding for houses ... The other thing is that because we've now got a number of people in the programme bidding, there's a risk that they're bidding against each other for the same properties (Provider, Edinburgh)*

Some Pathfinders (e.g. Dundee and Stirling) had developed a bespoke process for allocating properties, whereas others (e.g. Edinburgh and Glasgow) have worked within existing allocations systems (see Chapter 2). The pros and cons of each approach were the subject of considerable debate, particularly in Edinburgh where the EdIndex system was being used. Proponents of this approach advocated processing Housing First applications through the common register on grounds of transparency and greater fairness to other subpopulations applying for social housing. Opponents argued that very vulnerable individuals remain at a disadvantage (even when given intensive support), that the system leads to the geographic concentration of and competition amongst clients, and that it does not prevent Housing First clients from being 'bypassed' by housing providers.

*What's the point in having a common housing register if you're letting large numbers of properties outwith that? It undermines the principles of the common housing register ... We're really trying to avoid taking properties out of the choice-based system, because again, the more you do that the more... There's people questioning the transparency. You get somebody else who's been bidding for properties, suddenly they see, what's going on, that one wasn't advertised, somebody's gone into it, why was that? It's the whole integrity of the system that we ... need to have an eye on. (Stakeholder, Edinburgh)*

*EdIndex is designed for the general population, for people that have enough capacity and energy to be bidding on properties and who can make informed choices on their own behalf about locations and the quality of life and their knowledge of that area. I think for very vulnerable people it's a nonsense ... I think a Common Housing Register is an important thing from a housing perspective, absolutely ... [but] ... If we're genuinely committed to Housing First, as a nation and as local authorities and partnerships ... bespoke arrangements are ... the only way to do it. It takes a different housing allocation approach that is just as personalised as every other aspect of Housing First. (Stakeholder, Edinburgh)*

The delays in accessing housing affecting some service users, predominantly but not solely those who were very specific about an area of preference, were a significant source of frustration for a number of provider interviewees. Those as noted to have had a demoralising impact on some individuals.

*[The average wait for housing in Aberdeen/shire] is still far too long. Certainly, with the people we're that we're getting in far quicker than that, engagement*

*works a lot better because there's momentum and they can see that there's things happening for them. The longer that someone has to wait, the more they think, well, this is just same old, same old ... I have to wait ... They can get a bit off put I suppose by having to wait. (Provider, Aberdeen/shire)*

*The average length of time from referral to tenancy ... I mean, it's crazy ... I do think there is something for us to reflect upon ... so that we aren't creating unrealistic expectations and hopes dashed ... The harm that that does for someone, potentially, is just awful. I don't know how many people we've lost off the programme ... people that have disengaged completely during the process ... got fed up. (Provider, Edinburgh)*

As noted in s.2.1, in Aberdeenshire some temporary furnished flats were 'flipped' into settled accommodation as a means of expediting access to settled housing where Housing First clients consented to this happening. Whilst the implications of this for user choice and therefore programme fidelity were recognised (see s 2.1.2), provider interviewees considered the use of flipped tenancies a pragmatic solution in the context of low levels of housing availability and turnover in rural contexts.

*In some instances, they've been able to flip the tenancy ... because, in a rural area, it can be difficult if, you know, a small village, there's probably not that [turnover] if they're wanting to still stay in that small village ... So although, again, if you're looking at the fidelity of the Housing First model, sometimes people would argue against that ... in those instances, then it would seem daft not to. (Provider, Aberdeen/shire)*

*So if somebody's in temporary accommodation and they're enjoying where it is they're staying, then Aberdeenshire council then change that to permanent. That even stops the whole stress of moving from one area to another because they're already enjoying it ... So that's really good, that's really positive. (Frontline staff, Aberdeen/shire)*

Provider and stakeholder interviewees acknowledged that levels of RSL buy-in to Housing First was variable, with some far more willing to sign up Pathfinder clients than others. Some Pathfinders had benefited from strong existing relationships with particular RSLs, borne out of the latter's previous involvement with Housing First programmes (e.g. Turning Point Scotland's 'legacy' Housing First service in Glasgow) or other initiatives. A few RSLs had agreed to prioritise Housing First referrals. Other Pathfinder representatives reported that they were still working very hard to promote the Housing First approach amongst RSLs. A minority of RSLs had attempted to impose conditions on tenancies which conflict with the principles of Housing First (e.g. SSSTs) or charge large deposits for individual cases; some but not all Pathfinders had successfully resisted this.

*There's been a mixed experience here of RSLs. I think it's something to do with some of the less-involved RSLs getting used to what we're trying to do and also being reminded of the social responsibility ... they do have to offer 50 per cent of their availability up to homeless individuals. So we sometimes have to remind one or two of them of that responsibility ... We're getting there, we detail the level of support they get. (Provider, Aberdeen/shire)*

That said, it was noted that housing providers and other key stakeholders in some areas were 'coming around' to Housing First as they began to witness it 'working' for some of the service users who had previously been cycling around local homelessness services for many years.

*There were a few individuals ... who were fairly negative about the Housing First process, expecting it to fail ... In the space of a year ... we don't get the same comments that we were maybe getting in the early days ... 'We've known this person before, he's never going to last.' (Frontline staff, Stirling)*

In Stirling, the comparatively small number of housing providers to engage with, and existing connections with named housing officers, was seen as a key factor facilitating mobilisation. In Edinburgh, by way of contrast, the greater number of housing providers made the task of building awareness of Housing First across the sector rather more challenging.

*We had a strong relationship with Stirling Council ... It's a relatively small local authority ... I think that that probably means that you can cut through some of the bureaucracy much more quickly. Never mind the fact that they were working with much smaller numbers ... So really strong partnership working because the scale of it was much smaller. I think the scale did make a difference in terms of the complexities around about it. (Provider, Stirling)*

*We don't know where the housing is coming from within the EdIndex partners because it depends on where people bid. Then it multiplies these relationships we need to have, and we don't know who doesn't know about Housing First sometimes. We're trying to find ways at the moment of making sure that we can get into all the housing providers and we have point of contact so that we can try and filter information down. I don't think everybody that needs to know about Housing First does yet. (Provider, Edinburgh)*

The approximately quarterly 'Connect' events, hosted by Homeless Network Scotland and attended by Pathfinder providers and other key stakeholders, were also identified as having facilitated delivery. These were said to have offered an invaluable forum enabling shared learning and fostering joint working both within and across Pathfinders.

A number of interviewees emphasised that any endeavour to promote Housing First amongst social housing providers will need to acknowledge and tackle head on concerns regarding any perceived lack of 'fairness' associated with the prioritisation of Housing First clients.

*Those conversations need to be with housing providers prior to local authorities commissioning for these services so that it has been joined up prior to it, so that it has been designed with that in mind ... You've got to have people wanting to do it because it's the right thing ... and it fits with their objectives of what it is that they want to do. (Stakeholder, Glasgow)*

It was also noted by some interviewees that enhancing levels of awareness amongst RSL and council housing officers regarding the impacts of trauma on individuals' interactions with services would be highly beneficial going forward.

*This was a consortium case where somebody was offered a tenancy and ... the person reacted maybe in quite a challenging way and the offer was withdrawn. Then the situation escalated ... There is still a kind of lack of understanding around people and their behaviour. (Provider, Glasgow)*

Building on this latter point, it should be noted that in addition to the provider-focused training mentioned above (see s.4.2.2), the Housing First Academy's Training Hub offers a more general introductory course which had been attended by a number of local authority and housing provider interviewees. This had been extremely well received by everyone who commented on it and was said to have had a substantial positive influence on stakeholders' levels of understanding regarding the approach, and challenges faced by the population it targets. Several interviewees emphasised that promoting participation amongst other stakeholders would further increase levels of awareness and understanding of Housing First across the housing and other relevant sectors. Some noted that if it were at all possible going forward, combining these introductory training courses with sessions focussing on locality-specific processes (such as referral, risk assessment and housing allocation, for example) would help to mitigate some of the challenges documented above.

#### 4.4.2 Furnishing properties

Most of the Pathfinders drew upon a combination personal budget allocations funded via the Pathfinder programme and SWF CCG provisions to furnish Housing First tenancies (see Chapter 2). Some housing providers complemented these provisions with starter packs containing essential items such as a microwave, crockery and bedding, for example. A number also installed additional safety measures such as fireguards on cookers and/or de-misting systems where there were particular concerns regarding fire risk.

The fact that applications for SWF provision cannot begin until after a tenancy is signed and the amount provided in any individual case is uncertain (where more than just white goods were applied for – see below) were a source of immense frustration for Pathfinder staff. Further to this, lengthy delays (of up to several weeks in some cases) in receiving decisions and payments were common. These were exacerbated across all areas by the COVID pandemic.

*The issue lies with the fact that we can't apply for the Scottish Welfare Fund until that person has ... has signed the lease. So we can't even apply for it prior; because it happens so quickly, them getting the tenancy, going to look at it, signing it and then will apply ... People are having to move so quickly. (Frontline staff, Edinburgh)*

Delays in obtaining SWF grants meant that some Pathfinder clients had had to move into their properties with minimal if any furnishings. This situation was reported to have had a very negative impact on some affected service users' moods, and elevated the risks of potential abandonment.

*[Sometimes] when people move in, they have no flooring and no white goods - which has presented a bit of a blockage for some of our clients. So they move in and they have no way to cook, and nowhere to store their food ... I think moving into a shell of an apartment lends itself to potential abandonment, potential antisocial behaviour and definitely low moods.... (Frontline staff, Edinburgh)*

There was a strong call from a number of frontline staff for consideration of whether provision might be made for a 'grace period' of up to two weeks for Housing First clients wherein they could retain access to temporary accommodation whilst grants are obtained, furnishings for their new property sourced and installed, and utilities set up. In Edinburgh, the provision of a Two Homes Payment for a particularly vulnerable young person enabling them to move into their Housing First property over the course of a few weeks had been extremely welcome.

*Two weeks ... would be ideal, to be honest ... it gives people breathing space. It gives us, as workers, time to help people and get things sorted out and applied for and then it also means that they're moving in to a more comfortable and furnished tenancy, which is going to feel more homely as opposed to just a rush job, where they're all stressed, you're stressed, they're stressed! It would make a smoother process, definitely. (Frontline staff, Edinburgh)*

*if there was a leeway of time where the person could stay in temporary accommodation and have both places covered until they can get flooring or white goods, that would alleviate the problem and - not totally mitigate it, because clients often want to move into their apartment and out of temporary accommodation - but if that option was there for some of them ... then we wouldn't have to move them in with just floorboards and no white goods. (Frontline staff, Edinburgh)*

Delays in accessing SWF grants had been mitigated to some extent in Dundee, wherein local negotiation for Housing First clients to be prioritised and the restriction of CCG applications to white goods only had expedited the process of sourcing funds for these key resources.

Further welfare benefit training may help staff make the most of existing CCG and SWF provisions,. That said, the challenges recounted above suggest that there may be value in national-level consideration regarding how statutory provision for funding furnishings might be more coordinated for Housing First clients (and indeed other recipients).

*The fact that you couldn't get the money until you move into a tenancy and ... You don't know if you're getting all your white goods or you don't know if you're getting all your carpets. Actually, why is that system set up so badly, even for people who you know are in Housing First? ... Even if a person knew like, right, this is the basic welfare fund it should have almost like a basic package that they offer and a person at least knows I'm getting this, I can use any money that I'm getting to buy this, this and this. I think that system could be better. (Provider, Glasgow)*

Where used (see Chapter 2), the supplementation of CCG provision with a personal budget for furnishing was universally welcomed. Some Pathfinder staff interviewees noted that further guidance regarding whether and if so to what extent such budgets could be spent on items that are not strictly furnishing-related but might nevertheless foster tenancy sustainment would be welcome.

*I suppose it's a really a kind of mad grey area isn't it? .... What if somebody wants an Xbox or something like that ... I've worked with service users and when they've been in difficulties and that, that's been their main activity and it's really made them comfortable. I'm not saying there's not an argument for that, I'm just saying it's quite a...when you start going beyond basic furnishings and all that, it's quite open ended isn't it? (Frontline staff, Glasgow)*

Some Pathfinders had developed relationships with local providers to source things like flooring and carpets/blinds at discounted rates (see Chapter 2). Similarly, arrangements made with local furniture initiatives such that Housing First clients could get discounted second-hand furniture. Together, these arrangements had enabled Housing First clients to 'stretch' their furnishing budget.

The Stirling Pathfinder and commissioned service provided by the Salvation Army in Glasgow both offered furniture packages which offered a degree of (but not unlimited) choice in terms of item, style and colour (see Chapter 2). Debates regarding the advantages and disadvantages of furniture packages versus personal budgets for furnishing properties highlights the challenge involved in balancing the maximisation of user choice and minimisation of the length of time it takes to set up a home.

*The reason we want people to have furniture and things in the property is because it will help them move in and get settled quicker. There's nothing worse than moving into a property with no carpets ... At the same time, we want people to be able to create a home and have a choice as to what that home looks like and furnishing. Trying to get those two things to work together was a bit tricky; how do we get this done really quickly and let people choose? (Provider, Edinburgh)*

*If someone's allocated a tenancy on the furniture package ... they can move in ... almost immediately. With the other way, I understand that people might want choice about buying their furniture out of Argos or whatever with their £1,500, but that process doesn't start until they get a tenancy and then they can't move in right away ... Whereas we could put that in right away and they can start their tenancy off on a good footing, which I do believe helps with tenancy sustainment. (Stakeholder, Glasgow)*

On this issue, some providers were strong advocates of the maximisation of user choice via arrangements such as the supported spend operated by the Glasgow Pathfinder consortium, for example.

*I like how we furnish properties. They all get a £1,500 allowance and the support worker goes with them, on a supported spend, and they purchase ... the immediate stuff they need to get into the house, the bed, a TV, of course, cooking facility and somewhere to sit. So that gets them in, and then over the next couple of weeks, they go and buy the other bits and pieces, the nice things that they want. (Provider, Glasgow)*

Others highlighted the benefits of a furniture package, such as that used in Stirling, in terms of the rapidity with which properties could be set up.

*Two big vans come up, one with a carpet fitter and the flooring that's going to be in the property, and the other with furniture. Within the space of generally three to four hours, the flat has [gone] from being a shell to being a home. That can be quite overwhelming for the person ... [One] was nearly in tears, he couldn't believe that this was all his, and the people were doing this for him. (Frontline staff, Stirling)*

## 4.5 Support delivery

### 4.5.1 Patterns in support requirements

Pathfinders' early experiences of support delivery confirmed just how variable service users' requirements can be over time. A number of frontline interviewees suggested that overall patterns of support needs and preferences, insofar as they could be discerned given the tendency for the

engagement of many service users to be very intermittent, tended to fall into three main phases. The first, an initial relationship-building phase, could sometimes require a substantial investment of time (and in extreme cases up to a year). 'Tests' of the stickiness of Housing First support were said to be relatively common during this phase.

*They [service users] also go through that testing period ... where, well, some of them anyway, will not engage with you, or try and exhibit really extreme behaviours because it's a defence mechanism that's scared people off in the past ... and when we've been through those ups and downs with people, then they seem to form really, really good positive relationships ... because they realise actually you're going to stick by me. (Provider, Aberdeen/shire)*

*The biggest thing is that, 'We've heard all these promises before.' It's trying to reassure them that this is different ... It's having that honest to goodness conversation with them and being honest with them about what we can actually do, and not make false promises that maybe people have done in the past for them. You build trust from that point. If they think that you're in their corner, you'll get a much better relationship with them, because you've got that right from the beginning. (Frontline staff, Stirling)*

A second phase, focussed on the process of moving and settling service users into their new home, was described as requiring particularly intensive support around practical things like dealing with welfare benefits, utility set-up, arranging for delivery of furnishings and so on. Staff interviewees observed that service users' requirements for emotional support were often particularly intensive around this time.

*When they move in, it's a massive change to them, and that's where the support ... tends to be really intensive for about the first month when they first move in, because it's a total shock to their system. You've got some of them not even able to sleep in their bed, because they're like, 'I've never slept in a proper bed like that before'. They're still sleeping on their couches and stuff, so it's a whole - it's a different mind frame that you have to help them to change, I suppose ... (Provider, Dundee)*

*It takes them a wee while to believe ... that they're able to sustain a tenancy, and it takes a good while for them to settle in ... Some people could be quite scared, because ... they've been in and out of hostels and prisons all their life ... It's just about recognising that, and just moral support for the person, and reassuring them, look, the help's here ... You deserve a chance at this, you deserve a chance to have your own house and your own place of safety. (Frontline staff, Dundee)*

The intensity and nature of support requirements in the third phase, after a service user had moved into their new home, were said to be highly variable depending on individuals' specific support needs and goals. Staff interviewees reported that it was not uncommon for service users to disengage from support temporarily after moving in before re-engaging when they encountered a challenge or crisis.

*Traditionally, there's then a bit of a dip [in engagement] once they're in, because they think ... 'Oh that's me sorted,' doors closed. Then, they realise that actually there's still this I need to address ... then they come back to you, go 'right, now I'm settled in my tenancy, actually I should really start addressing this', or ... 'I've*

*been in trouble with the police so can you help me' ... or they'll get a letter and they'll go, 'Oh, oh no,' so they'll phone up and they come back ... Then you start doing more meaningful work with them again. (Provider, Aberdeen/shire)*

Looking forward, Pathfinder providers were all mindful of the need to reflect on whether and in what circumstances it may be appropriate to reduce levels of ('step down') or potentially even end ('stand down') Housing First support in cases where service users no longer require the flexibility and intensity of support it offers.

*Now that we're getting to a stage where some participants are quite settled ... [we're thinking about] formalising some sort of exit plan. Do we then cut support down so that [support worker] sees them every two weeks with a phone call in-between and ... just pull back a little bit, to see how people cope? Knowing that we can go back in, if need be and then gradually decrease that further. (Provider, Stirling)*

This was a particular point of reflection for providers supporting young people, given the potential for their support needs to change.

*Moving into a house is one thing, but being able to think about your future is very much part of the support that young people need to make that transition. For some young people that might be you need that support at different points ... Things change as you go, and so it's almost like, in some ways, it's not a parental role, but it is that solid, 'We're with you all the way through.' I think that's the difference, that we would like to think there will be with Housing First for Youth, and that some actually might move on and move out of programme. (Provider, Aberdeen/shire)*

All did however emphasise that regardless of service users' age, any such transitions should be user-led, and that the option of reactivating Housing First support should remain open. On this point some emphasised the importance of ensuring that this aspect of fidelity was not compromised as Housing First is mainstreamed (see also s.4.7). A number also emphasised that the support of staff in enabling service users to make informed choices about any potential transition away from Housing First, actively encouraging reflection on possible implications and risks, will be critical going forward.

#### 4.5.2 Caseloads, travel and flexible working

A key point of learning regarding support delivery has been the importance of preserving small caseloads (see Chapter 2). Frontline staff who had experience of supporting more than seven people at one point in time, as was the scenario when Glasgow was severely short staffed in the early stages of mobilisation for example, reported that they inevitably had to focus on crisis-resolution. This had severely restricted their capacity for providing day-to-day support to service users who were not in crisis. It also meant that the (limited) support they were able to offer tended to focus on tenancy sustainment at the expense of things like promoting health, combatting social isolation and fostering community integration, for example. On this issue, a number of staff interviewees suggested that a caseload of seven (which is the maximum widely endorsed within the UK<sup>42</sup>) was 'manageable', but that their ability to deliver sufficiently intensive and/or flexible support to everyone on the case list was compromised where caseloads exceeded this.

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<sup>42</sup> Homeless Link (2020) *Developing Housing First: the 'non-negotiables'*. London: Homeless Link.

*I was up at nine [clients] at one point. I think [name of colleague] was up at ten at one point, which was just too much because ... Obviously what we were really doing with them was just making sure they were okay. We weren't actually able to offer them really any sort of time ... They did start more staff, so hopefully we'll get [back] to the optimum figure of seven. Six or seven. I think it's a bit more manageable. (Frontline staff, Glasgow)*

*I think it [a caseload of seven] works well actually ... Sometimes it doesn't feel like a lot [of support] at all, then sometimes it feels a little bit stressful, but I actually think seven is really manageable, usually. (Frontline staff, Edinburgh)*

Further reflection and ideally cost modelling is needed to identify what if anything might be regarded as an 'ideal' caseload going forward, especially as established Housing First programmes 'mature', given initial indications that at least some Pathfinder tenants' requirements for support have reduced over time (see s.4.5.1 and s.5.4.1). This modelling should ideally take account of the fact that many Housing First clients are extremely reluctant to accept support from people unknown to them (see Chapter 5), thereby reducing the utility of relief/bank workers for this particular client group. Any modelling exercise should therefore reflect on the implications of this issue for staffing levels and coverage when Housing First support workers are unavailable (due to attending training, annual leave, or sickness leave for example).

The impact of travel time on support delivery was another key learning point. This was identified as an issue by some staff interviewees in the larger urban centres (most notably Glasgow) but was especially acute in rural Aberdeenshire. There, the large distances involved, and poor or non-existent public transport options in some areas, meant that substantial proportions of staff time were absorbed by travel. A car was purchased for staff operating in the shire, with plans in place to purchase more as the project scaled up. A number of interviewees argued that lower caseloads may be required for Housing First in rural contexts, with some suggesting that a staff:client ratio of 1:5 may be more appropriate in such locations.

*I've got a guy in [name of suburb] actually ... It's an hour either way [by bus] ... The stuff that that you want to do with them, like supported spending or whatever, potentially take half a day to do. (Frontline staff, Glasgow)*

*Being out in the Shire, I'm out there every day. I spend ten to twelve hours driving, so in a 40-hour week, that's leaving me with a lot less time [to provide support]. (Frontline staff, Aberdeen/shire)*

The Pathfinders had all attempted to maximise the number of hours staff were available to support service users by arranging for staggered starts, shift working, and/or encouraging staff to work flexible hours. Some staff interviewees had welcomed and embraced the opportunity to work flexibly; others however were less able or willing to do so.

In terms of out of hours support, provider interviewees emphasised that calls made to their emergency helplines or out of hours on-call service had been rare. As noted in Chapter 2, most had encouraged service users to contact other agencies who would be better placed to respond in a genuine emergency out of hours (e.g. emergency repair services or the police).

*What we have found is that if people want to be supported outwith the usual working hours, then we'll find a way of doing that ... If people wanted to be*

*supported in the evenings and weekends, that has happened and does happen. We tend to find, generally, people don't want you nosing about their life on a Sunday lunchtime. They're just people like you and I ... We will be there the first thing the next morning to try and work out what's gone on and stuff like that. We're trying to temper people's expectations, 1) that we can manage 24-hour support for everybody, and 2) that people need it. (Provider, Edinburgh)*

#### 4.5.3 Pandemic impacts on support delivery

The onset of the pandemic and associated restrictions meant that the delivery of face-to-face support by the Pathfinders was severely curtailed, especially in the first lockdown. Some providers maintained a requirement that some face-to-face contact was maintained (unless service users requested otherwise because of health concerns for example); for others staff only met with service users in person where there were concerns regarding especially vulnerable individuals who were deemed to be at significant risk. All other contact was made remotely via telephone or online platforms (see below).

Levels of face-to-face contact increased when lockdown restrictions eased, but even then conversations were conducted in a socially distanced fashion outdoors, on door-steps, or from stairwells. Staff and service users were equipped with personal protective equipment (such as masks, hand sanitiser and gloves). Some service users had had to be matched with new support workers given the need for some staff members to shield for health reasons during the earliest phases of the pandemic. Staff absences due to illness or the need to self-isolate had created pressure on staffing in most Pathfinders on at least some occasions.

In all Pathfinder areas, service users who did not already have mobile phones were issued with them so that staff could retain regular contact. In some areas, additional resource for Information Technology was sourced. In Dundee, for example, Connecting Scotland donated laptops, sim cards and wifi dongles, and Pathfinder staff were trained to teach service users to utilise them safely. In Aberdeen/shire money from Crisis' In This Together Homelessness Emergency Fund was used to purchase mobile phones and computer hardware/software. These initiatives not only helped staff remain in contact with service users, but also helped to counteract some of the difficulties reported in other Pathfinder areas relating to the on-line maintenance of welfare benefit accounts during lockdowns.

Provider interviewees noted that some service users had responded very well to the increased use of remote means of communication; indeed, it was reported that some of the young people supported by the Edinburgh Pathfinder preferred it to regular face-to-face contact. This was not true for others, however, with some service users discontinuing engagement completely and proving to be impossible to re-contact in the absence of face-to-face meetings. It was noted that telephone and on-line modes of contact had worked more effectively for those clients that staff had an existing relationship with than 'new' clients for whom this was not the case. Provider and other stakeholder interviewees concluded that the telephone and on-line contact proved to be useful complements to face-to-face meetings but that these were "*nowhere near as good as face-to-face contact*" and should not be regarded as a substitute.

*Over COVID-19, our tenancy sustainment rate reduced to 88 per cent. Now that, to me, has been a direct result of not getting the face-to-face support that complex customers need. (Stakeholder, Glasgow)*

Long delays in the processing of Social Welfare applications during the pandemic had been highly problematic in some areas; so too had difficulties in sourcing furniture and getting it delivered during the early lockdowns. Some of the Pathfinders responded very creatively to the challenges involved in getting flats furnished. In Dundee, for example, Pathfinder staff drove Transform Community Development's vans to deliver furniture from the organisation's warehouses to service users and/or assisted in the decoration of their flats (within established staff 'bubbles'). Most Pathfinders were also directly involved in the regular delivery of food and/or other essential items such as toiletries to Pathfinder clients, typically in collaboration with other local support providers. These very 'hands on' forms of assistance and the apparent willingness of staff to 'go the extra mile' during the pandemic were noted to have helped to foster the trust of service users.

The pandemic was noted to have had, on balance, a positive effect on joint working with other agencies. This was generally attributed to a strong and widely shared commitment to 'make things work' to safeguard the wellbeing of vulnerable people and an associated 'can do attitude' amongst stakeholder organisations. In Stirling, for example, arrangements were made so that Pathfinder staff could pick up and transport prescribed methadone (a controlled substance) to service users with police authorisation. The Dundee Pathfinder coordinated the response to its clients across the city, in collaboration with the HSCP, Housing Options, and Homes Scotland, such that Pathfinder staff dropped off goods to service users on other agencies' behalf. In Edinburgh, a more flexible approach to referrals and assessments was adopted by council services in order to break through 'red tape' during the pandemic. The moratorium on evictions (see s.3.2) was noted as having further bolstered solutions-focused approaches to joint working during the pandemic.

Some other services adopted an outreach approach to service delivery during the lockdowns, which a few provider interviewees noted to be particularly effective for the 'captive audience' of service users who were resident in hotels accommodating people who had been rough sleeping at the beginning of lockdown<sup>43</sup>. A number, including some drug and alcohol services and longer-term mental health providers did not, however, which restricted the range of services that some Pathfinders could refer service users into. A few frontline staff interviewees also noted that their ability to attend appointments with service users had been limited during the pandemic given social distancing restrictions.

*The only thing that's really quite hard is not being able to go into appointments with people because of the social distancing and stuff. That's happened at times as well ... You can go to the door with them, moral support and stuff, but actually physically going into the appointment is very much a hit or a miss. (Frontline staff, Dundee)*

A number of frontline staff interviewees emphasised that the closure of some community facilities, and imposition of social distancing regulations more generally, had severely curtailed their ability to support service users to integrate within their local community and thereby combat social isolation and/or promote engagement in meaningful activity.

*You notice in about four weeks down the line, especially if somebody is trying to stay away from their peers and the substance users they can get quite lonely, and that's where the loneliness, the pressures, and that starts kicking in. So yes, that's when you start to try and integrate into groups and go along to groups, and the community cafes and things like that, but it's been difficult with COVID because none of these are open just now. (Frontline staff, Dundee)*

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<sup>43</sup> Fitzpatrick, S., Mackie, P., Pawson, H., Watts, B., and Wood, J. (2021) *The COVID-19 crisis response to homelessness in Great Britain: interim report*. Glasgow: CACHE

#### 4.5.4 Combatting social isolation

Existing research evidence on Housing First indicates that the aims of combatting social isolation and fostering community integration are widely reported as being challenging to achieve<sup>44</sup>. The Pathfinders' early experiences were no exception in this regard. One provider interviewee's observation that whilst the issue of social isolation was at the forefront of their minds it had proven to be "a particularly difficult nut to crack" was illustrative of the sentiments of many others. Efforts to support service users in this area had been severely thwarted by social distancing measures and the closure of community facilities during the pandemic (see s.4.5.3 above).

*The population is a community and what we're asking people to do is come out of that community and into a tenancy, and then there's nothing. So suddenly, it's all a period of, I've got my own house, and I've got my furniture, and I've got all of this sort of stuff to do, and then everything else ... So we've got some people who have been rough sleeping and begging, so they've come back in to be part of what they know ... [but] they've still got the tenancy... I don't think we've cracked that yet about how we [respond]. (Stakeholder, Glasgow)*

*We're actively encouraging people to get involved with their local community where possible ... We've had a few with extreme social isolation situations, where we've said, right, well actually you can head there, and they've met up with people that they can talk to. Through there there's yoga classes ... music classes ... and I think we're just at the very start of that curve, even as an organisation I think that there's more that we want to do in terms of [addressing] social isolation. (Provider Aberdeen/shire)*

It was also noted that social isolation and community integration were the outcomes areas most likely to be 'neglected' when Pathfinders were under-staffed and support workers were forced to focus on crisis resolution (see s.4.5.2). A number of interviewees highlighted a need for further consideration regarding how best to support service users in this general area going forward.

One early lesson learned in this general area is that rather than leave conversation about social support networks and meaningful activity until the point that someone is housed – which can be a risk given the prerogative of housing people as quickly as possible – there is utility in initiating conversations about what service users enjoy doing and/or how they like to spend their time (or what they may like to try, if they are unsure) very early after their recruitment to Housing First. It was noted by some interviewees that where these conversations had occurred early on in support planning, it had helped staff and service users identify activities which later mitigated potential social isolation and boredom. These were noted as having positive knock-on benefits of both promoting levels of engagement and mitigating against anti-social behaviour.

A few interviewees emphasised the imperative of ensuring that all service users were provided with and supported to ensure they were confident in using information technology in order to combat social isolation and/or boredom. On a related note, a number of frontline staff interviewees called for clarification regarding whether at least some of service users' personal budgets might be spent on activities to combat boredom and/or facilitate community integration, such as the purchase of

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<sup>44</sup> Mackie, P., Johnsen, S. and Wood, J. (2017) *Ending Rough Sleeping: What Works? An international evidence review*. Crisis, London. Johnsen, S. (2014) *Turning Point Scotland Housing First Pilot evaluation: final report*. Edinburgh: Heriot-Watt University.

digital communication technology, games consoles, TV packages and/or gym memberships, to give but a few examples.

#### 4.5.5 Facilitating access to other services

Interview data indicated that levels of awareness of, and buy-in to, Housing First by key stakeholders in other sectors, most notably health and criminal justice, were highly variable at both strategic and frontline levels in the early stages of programme implementation. Most consortia and partner stakeholders were able to build on and benefit from at least some pre-existing relationships with key stakeholders, such as senior representatives in community policing or health practitioners with specialist expertise in homelessness and complex needs, to name but a few examples. Where these existed, they were without exception considered key factors facilitating Pathfinder mobilisation and delivery.

Stakeholder interviewees indicated that there was a strong appetite for greater strategic cross-sector collaboration regarding Housing First, albeit that the full ramifications for any future formalised partnership and/or shared funding arrangements going forward were still being thought through at the point of fieldwork.

*In terms of Health and Social Care Partnerships and their connections ... That's evolving rather than negotiated ... It's evolving in different places ... My own perspective would be this is a really exciting opportunity ... However, we've got a mental health service and a substance misuse service that is groaning under demand ... There's challenges around there that we need to address. (Stakeholder, Edinburgh)*

Yet, even where a high level of commitment to Housing First at the strategic level had already been achieved, this had not necessarily translated into 'open doors' for service users on the ground. As one provider explained "staff are always battling against other systems ... and services" when trying to broker clients' access to services. Difficulties accessing mental health provision was widely reported as being especially problematic, as has been noted for this client group more generally in Scotland and elsewhere in the UK<sup>45</sup>.

*We've had great success with the NHS and we've had really poor success with the NHS, it just seems to depend who you get on the day ... [Sometimes] we see someone that is incapable of safeguarding themselves, and mental health services and medical services are saying, 'This is a choice.' We are saying, 'It's a bit far down the road for a choice.' 'No, this is a choice,' and discharging them time and time again. (Provider, Aberdeen/shire)*

In some areas, staff noted that service users had been 'dropped' by other support agencies after being recruited to Housing First.

*There's been friction with other services as well, where there's been that, 'well, you've been picked up by Housing First', so complex needs or not, why are we still working with them? ... A bit of backwards and forwards about whose responsibility it was to provide day-to-day support prior to people moving in. (Frontline staff, Glasgow)*

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<sup>45</sup> Bramley, G., Fitzpatrick, S., Wood, J., Sosenko, F., Blenkinsopp, J., Littlewood, M., Frew, C., Bashar, T., McIntyre, J. and Johnsen, S. (2019) *Hard Edges Scotland: new conversations about severe and multiple disadvantage*. Lankelly Chase and The Robertson Trust, London

These challenges were attributed, in large part to resource constraints affecting statutory services and/or the fact that most are unable to operate with the same degree of flexibility as Housing First. Staff interviewees recalled many instances of rigid eligibility criterion, especially as regards engagement requirements, serving as barriers.

*Other services tend to be appointment systems. Three counts and you're out. That doesn't work for a lot of people ... We need to look at how we provide, even statutory services across the piece, because ... [they] need to be much more flexible than that. We're not going to change that overnight, unfortunately. (Frontline staff, Stirling)*

The need for collaborative problem-solving in any attempt to resolve these issues was widely recognised and allied with a broader call for cross-sector systems change. The fact that a number of barriers to service access had been removed during the pandemic, thus setting a precedent for the feasibility of at least some relaxations, gave some interviewees grounds to be optimistic that other such changes might be possible going forward.

*I think it's about working together ... Everybody agrees that the system is not perfect, so is there learning as we go. I think that openness to this isn't a threat, we're not doing this in an accusative manner. It's about, 'God, that bit's not working ... What can we do around that? How can we work together to begin to solve that?' (Provider, Aberdeen/shire)*

*There's been a lot of barriers that have come down through COVID, for instance like medication getting delivered to homes, and being quicker to get back on a [methadone] script if they don't go to the chemist for the three days and get cut off ... There's not so much red tape ... I hope these barriers stay down when COVID goes (Frontline staff, Dundee)*

## 4.6 Responding to exploitation and antisocial behaviour

Incidents of antisocial behaviour, wherein Housing First clients had been either a perpetrator or victim (and in some cases both), were reported in all Pathfinder areas. The perpetration of antisocial behaviour by Pathfinder tenants was reported in all Pathfinder areas, albeit not to the level that many providers had anticipated or that other stakeholders (most notably housing providers) had feared.

*People have had problems [with antisocial behaviour], they've had problems but ... we've got 54 people in tenancies ... There's no comparison in terms of those 54 individuals living in a residential [hostel] building, there would probably be half a dozen incidents a day. (Provider, Glasgow)*

Based on their early experiences of Pathfinder delivery, provider interviewees identified that two key factors had been critical in the prevention of and responses to antisocial behaviour. First, a rapid response to any signs of an issue developing was said to have been key in preventing its escalation. Second, effective joint working with housing officers was highly beneficial; in particular regular contact between housing officers and Housing First workers, and where necessary their joint visit with service users, were said to have been valuable. The use of multiagency meetings where any issues relating to individual cases of concern were discussed was also noted to be helpful.

*I think the relationships, obviously, between the support workers and the tenants are absolutely crucial ... Say for example if we've seen antisocial behaviour reported, we would link in with the support provider and we would go in and do joint meetings and that sort of thing. That can be quite helpful because we could go in with a probably more heavy hand, being a landlord, and being quite factual about, 'This is what this may mean for you down the line if this continues', where the support provider being present, they can think about; right, what are the solutions that we can try, and reach out to support the person and to stop the behaviours ... That's working; that works really well. (Stakeholder, Stirling)*

*So what I found was quite heartening was, when there is anti-social behaviour the housing officer doesn't go in right away with tackety [hobnail] boots. They know it's a Housing First customer. They know and that they'll come and phone my team and say there's an issue. They'll let us know what the issue is and then we'll speak to the support worker and then you'll raise it at the RAG [Red Amber Green risk assessment meeting] so that it's given the focus that it requires. (Stakeholder, Glasgow)*

*[When] we've got a property identified but we've not actually started a tenancy, the support provider comes and meets with the housing officer, ideally with the prospective tenant there ... It's much easier to work through issues if you've got a personal relationship with somebody, you've met them ... I think for me that's kind of a key thing to establish that relationship really early on. (Stakeholder, Edinburgh)*

A few Pathfinder provider interviewees acknowledged that further work was needed to improve levels of communication with housing officers, particularly in contexts where they did not have pre-existing relationships with all relevant housing providers, so that any concerns regarding antisocial behaviour are dealt with expeditiously. On a related point, a number of interviewees also emphasised the need for Pathfinder staff to be mindful of and sympathetic to the concerns of housing officers as regards their duty of care to both Pathfinder tenants and other residents in the neighbourhood.

*[For] a landlord there's a lot of risk ... Not just in particular with that property, but it's all the other properties within a stairwell or a tenement or whatever ... I think it's just finding ways of communicating ... and overcoming the risk together, and I think if we achieve that in the coming months in the year ahead, I think we'll be doing well .... I think we've come a long way ... We've a long way to go yet. (Provider, Edinburgh)*

*When it comes to meetings, it's about building relationships ... I'll say [to staff], 'You're advocating for the service user, but at the same time, you're also supporting the housing officer', because if something wrong has happened, it's happened. (Provider, Glasgow)*

A number of interviewees described having dealt with scenarios wherein the service user was a victim of exploitation or antisocial behaviour, often resulting from what was described as a lack of 'door management' or 'gatekeeping' skills. A few of these individuals had been 'cuckooed', that is, had their homes appropriated by other people necessitating a supported move into alternative accommodation. A case of financial exploitation of a service user which led to them experiencing rent arrears was also reported in one Pathfinder area.

*Door control, for me, is a huge issue in terms of people not being able to manage that and I think that's a big part of what we need to do as workers. Its about supporting people to manage their door and feeling able to say no and locking the door and not letting people in and that kind of thing. That's easier said than done, as we know. (Provider, Stirling)*

In most such cases, service users had been exploited by peers or dealers associated with local drugs networks. In Aberdeen/shire, however, the issue of individuals with multiple and complex needs being cuckooed by people involved in long-distance 'county line' drugs markets had presented a significant problem affecting a few service users. Driven at least in part by the relative saturation of heroin and crack markets in England's major cities, the county lines drugs supply model has become increasingly prominent in the UK's smaller satellite urban centres in recent years, often far from their native urban hubs, and have a reputation for causing significant harms including serious violence and the targeted exploitation of vulnerable individuals<sup>46</sup>.

*Chaotic drug use, cuckooing was a major issue we picked up with one individual. You know, they've been inviting these people to use their home as a drug den, and when we try to bring that to an end ... we [had to get] the police involved and a place of protection had to be put in place. (Provider, Aberdeen)*

Whilst a number of cases of service users having developed positive relationships with neighbours were commented on by interviewees, it was also reported that in a few cases neighbours had been a source of harassment or exploitation. Frontline staff interviewees noted that this issue had been more of a problem during the early pandemic lockdowns when the vast majority of the general population was confined to their homes for much of the time.

*Some neighbours have been absolutely fantastic ... we had neighbours rallying around a Housing First customer, cooking for them and handing wee parcels of food and making sure that he was okay ... We [also] get, as I said, that case ... someone was trying to use [complaints about a Housing First tenant in order to secure a move for themselves] for a means to their end to achieve their own aspirations. (Stakeholder, Glasgow)*

*We actually had one of our lads, obviously the face didn't fit, and he was almost picked on from his neighbours ... but we had a lot of support from the antisocial team with them, because they could also recognise that the things they [neighbours] were saying our lad was doing, he wasn't. We managed to get [him] transferred into another tenancy, which it's completely changed his living situation now. (Provider, Dundee)*

In a small number of cases, a supported move to alternative accommodation had been required. Some provider interviewees emphasised the value of using local intelligence regarding local neighbourhoods, such as the community mapping exercise conducted in conjunction with housing officers in Stirling for example (see s.2.5), to minimise the risk of service users being subject to exploitation or harassment from peers or neighbours.

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<sup>46</sup> Spicer, J., Moyle, L. and Coomber, R. (2020) The variable and evolving nature of 'cuckooing' as a form of criminal exploitation in street level drug markets. *Trends in Organized Crime*, 23: 301-323.

## 4.7 Fidelity preservation

The imperative of preserving fidelity to Housing First principles going forward, especially as the Pathfinders are mainstreamed and the approach becomes the default response for homeless people with complex needs in Scotland, was a key point of emphasis in many interviews.

### 4.7.1 Guarding against programme drift

There was widespread anxiety that in a context of resource constraints, and in the absence of formal regulation, commissioners and/or providers may 'drift' from the core principles of the approach. Three main risks were highlighted as areas of concern.

First, there were widespread anxiety about potential pressure to increase staff caseloads in such a way that the optimum staff:client ratio is jeopardised, thereby compromising providers' ability to deliver the necessary flexibility and intensity of support, amongst others (see Chapter 2).

*I'd be worried if when ... local authorities start to roll it out via their RRTPs ... there's no obligation on them to say we want it to be one person that works with seven people ... They can design it any way they want ... So they will start drifting from what that model is. (Provider, Glasgow)*

Second, several interviewees feared that constraints may be put on the length of time Housing First projects can support service users, thereby compromising providers' ability to deliver the required longevity of support. Discussions about 'exit strategies' were a particular prompt for concern in this area.

*I've been asked ... 'Have you thought about exit strategies'? I was like 'I'll bring the seven principles to the meeting next time I come and you just won't see exit strategies on there!' I think there's even from where people are getting it sometimes the system that they're working in still catches up with them. (Provider, Glasgow)*

Third, there were concerns that if Housing First is delivered 'in house' by local authorities, the separation of housing and support may be compromised.

*I don't think it would stick with the fidelity of the model if [a council] took that in-house, got the funding for it and decided to deliver it themselves. I think when you're the housing provider and the support provider, you can sometimes come up against conflicts, or maybe compromise ... I think the worry is that it'll all fall back to a housing-led programme. (Provider, Aberdeen/shire)*

A number of interviewees therefore called for consideration of the development of some form of governance and/or regulation in relation to the wider roll-out of Housing First across Scotland, with a view to safeguarding fidelity to the core principles in the long term.

*There is something about the fidelity of the model that requires an independence as far as governance and regulation's concerned ... I'm suggesting there needs to be a regulatory function and who that sits with should be discussed. (Provider, Aberdeen/shire)*

Consideration of fidelity in the proposed 'Housing First Check-Up'<sup>47</sup> appraisal process, which was still under consultation at the time of writing and expected to mobilise in October 2021, is therefore welcome. It is anticipated that the annual appraisal process will involve self-reflection by Housing First providers, collation of insights from local partners, participatory audits with Housing First tenants, and a review of local evidence and policy at the local authority level. The proposed Check-Up process will be facilitated by Homelessness Network Scotland in partnership with the Scottish Government.

#### 4.7.2 The importance of terminology

As a slight aside, but relevant to the issue of fidelity, were a number of interviewees' observations regarding some of the terminology associated with Housing First. A key lesson has related to the unhelpfulness of the term 'ready' in reference to members of the population targeted. Sometimes support workers or other professionals use the phrase 's/he is not ready for Housing First' when an individual has declined an offer on grounds that they do not want Housing First (or indeed any form of independent tenancy, regardless of the level of support provided) at that particular point in time, as implied in the following comment for example:

*There's two or three of them [people referred] that really just weren't ready for Housing First. A couple of them were coming back and saying, 'I don't want a home, I'm not happy rough sleeping but I like the life that I've got at the moment. I don't really want the responsibility of having a home'. (Frontline staff, Edinburgh)*

The description of someone as 'not being ready' for Housing First on these grounds is often later (understandably, yet incorrectly) misconstrued as evidence of a judgement having been made regarding that individual's 'housing readiness', that is, presumed ability to maintain a tenancy. This has the unfortunate consequence that other stakeholders sometimes presume that people who simply do not want Housing First have been denied access to it because of a lack of housing readiness and thereby question the programme's fidelity to Housing First principles.

Further to this, lessons have been learned regarding the terminology used to describe Housing First support. Most notably, the term 'support package', which is widely used within the housing sector is problematic when used in relation to Housing First. It implies that the type and level of support is more pre-defined and fixed than it is (or should be) in practice in Housing First programmes. Its use can contribute to misunderstanding about the distinction between Housing First and other models of tenancy support, and can on occasion cause some stakeholders to question whether its use is indicative of deviations or fidelity to Housing First principles.

*The model [of Housing First] that we've got in Scotland, as I understand it, is that [a] house comes with a support package, so is that the fidelity of the model? I don't know. (Stakeholder, Glasgow)*

## 4.8 Conclusion

A number of key lessons have been learned as regards the design and early development of Housing First programmes. First, the amount of time required to develop partnerships with key stakeholders across all relevant sectors (most notably housing providers, but also those in health and social care,

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<sup>47</sup> Homeless Network Scotland (2021) *Housing First Check-Up: consultation on a quality-check for Scotland*, Summer 2021. Glasgow: Homeless Network Scotland.

and criminal justice) should not be underestimated. Second, attempts to develop relationships with stakeholders in other sectors should target individuals in frontline roles (e.g. housing officers) as well as those operating at a strategic level. Third, adequate time should be invested in clarifying and communicating the roles and responsibilities of all stakeholders, and associated processes (e.g. referral pathways), insofar as possible before implementation. Fourth, it should be expected that the nature and location of implementational 'sticking points' will shift over time.

A key challenge across all Pathfinder areas has been sourcing the required number of suitable one-bedroom properties in areas that the people being supported want to live. This has contributed to long delays in allocating homes to some people, with this issue being especially acute in the highest pressure housing markets (most notably Edinburgh). The experiences of the Pathfinders to date indicate that Housing First providers face a particular challenge in balancing: a) maximisation of user choice with regard to housing location/type, with b) minimisation of risk of harm (to both service users and their neighbours), and c) time taken to source housing. A key task for frontline workers is to support service users to make informed choices regarding housing (and indeed other aspects of their lives), such that they are aware of the full range of options available to them and are supported to assess the potential benefits, limitations, and risks associated with each.

The vast majority (98%) of properties allocated to date have been in the social rented sector. Levels of RSL understanding of and buy-in to Housing First were reported to be widely variable. The Pathfinders had benefited from very strong support from a number, and levels of interest and commitment amongst others were said to be increasing as the effectiveness of the approach with individuals previously deemed 'unhousable' was becoming increasingly evident locally. PRS use has been very limited given concerns about affordability, albeit that greater use has not been ruled out in some areas (notably Dundee) given its potential to increase service users' access to housing in city centre locations.

The question of whether Housing First clients should be allocated housing within or outwith mainstream allocation processes has been a subject of extensive debate in some areas. Those who support the use of mainstream processes do so on grounds of transparency and the preservation of 'fairness' to other applicants, but challenges encountered in Edinburgh indicate that the use of mainstream choice-based lettings system can have unintended negative consequences including the geographic concentration of and competition amongst Housing First clients, and do not prevent RSLs from 'bypassing' Housing First clients.

Delays accessing furniture resulting, in large part, from issues associated with SWF applications had been a significant problem in some areas. This has been very problematic given the negative affect that moving into minimally or unfurnished tenancies had had on residents' moods and motivation, and an elevated risk of potential abandonment. There was a strong call for SWF grant application processes to be made more efficient and/or for consideration to be given to the adoption of a 'grace period' of up to two weeks, potentially covered by a Two Homes Payment, enabling Housing First tenants to furnish and move into their homes.

The use of furniture packs instead of or in addition to personal budgets by some providers effectively circumvents the above-mentioned delays in furnishing properties. Their utilisation does impose some restrictions on user choice (see Chapter 2), but providers using furniture packages consider that an acceptable trade-off given that they enable properties to be furnished expeditiously. Frontline staff endorse the preservation of at least some funding to allow for personalisation, whilst also calling for further clarity, and ideally the relaxation of rules, regarding what these funds might be spent on so that at least a proportion might be used to facilitate meaningful activity and/or community integration for example.

Key lessons regarding referral processes included the importance of ensuring that eligibility criteria are clear and communicated effectively to referral agents, that potential clients should be informed of and consent to their referral to Housing First, and that a tool such as the NDT, whilst imperfect, is helpful in prioritising referrals. Further to this, there is clear value in having multi-agency input into referral assessments, but support providers should always be involved in decisions regarding whether Housing First might be suitable for any individual referred. This is especially critical where there is clear disparity in levels of 'risk appetite' amongst key stakeholders.

On a related note, the early experiences of the Pathfinders indicate that even if an individual meets eligibility criteria, they should never be 'pushed' to accept an offer of Housing First if they do not want it. Furthermore, Housing First is not suitable for individuals who lack capacity to comprehend a standard tenancy agreement and/or the consequences of failing to adhere to its conditions (if for example they have severe learning difficulties or alcohol related brain damage). Housing First should also not be deemed suitable for an individual whose healthcare or other needs exceed the level that the intervention can realistically provide, that is, they require high support accommodation offering 24/7 care.

Recruitment of staff had been difficult in some Pathfinder areas. This issue was compounded by differences in the salary and conditions between consortia providers and raised broader questions regarding the adequacy of pay for Housing First support workers given the skills required and demands associated with their role. The provision of adequate levels of supervisory support and opportunities for reflective practice for frontline staff were widely identified as being of critical importance, as was provision for staff to access clinical supervision wherever possible given the risk of them being exposed to vicarious trauma and/or potential burnout.

The training provided by the Housing First Academy Training Hub had been well received by frontline staff and external stakeholders alike. Demand for additional 'locality-specific' training which not only introduces the key principles of Housing First but also provides an overview of local referral, assessment and allocation processes in different contexts was identified. There was also a clear call for the continuation of events akin to the 'Connect' series hosted by Homeless Network Scotland during the Pathfinder programme given the opportunities afforded for shared learning and joint working.

Incidents of anti-social behaviour wherein Housing First tenants had been either a victim or perpetrator (and in some cases both) had occurred in all Pathfinder areas, but had been much less prevalent than had been anticipated by many stakeholders. Two key factors were deemed to have been effective in preventing and mitigating anti-social behaviour: firstly, rapid response to early signs of an issue developing; and secondly, effective communication and joint working between Housing First support providers and housing officers.

The importance of preserving small caseloads has been a key finding, given the detrimental impact that (unintentionally) exceeding the intended 1:7 staff:client ratio has had on staff members' ability to deliver the flexibility and intensity of support required. Where staff have supported more people than this, support delivery has tended to focus on crisis resolution, and on tenancy sustainment at the expense of supporting clients in other (non-housing) aspects of their lives. A case might be made for an even lower caseload in rural areas to take account of travel requirements. Further reflection and ideally cost modelling is needed to identify what might be regarded an 'ideal' caseload going forward given initial indications that at least some Pathfinder tenants' requirements for support have reduced over time.

Pathfinders' success in brokering access to other services, especially in the field of mental health, was variable. Dissonance between the flexible approach to support delivery endorsed by Housing First and the comparatively inflexible statutory systems it works in conjunction with remains a perennial problem. The need for collaborative problem-solving in any attempt to resolve these issues was widely recognised and allied with a broader call for cross-sector systems change. The fact that a number of barriers had been removed during the pandemic has given grounds for optimism regarding the possibility of positive change going forward.

There is a strong call for the preservation of commitment to fidelity as Housing First is rolled out more widely across Scotland. Concerns regarding three perceived threats to fidelity are prominent, these being risks that: a) sufficiently low staff caseloads will be jeopardised; b) constraints may be imposed on the length of time that service users are able to receive Housing First support; and c) the separation of housing support may be compromised if local authorities take Housing First provision 'in house'. In a related vein, interviewees consistently emphasised that any attempts to 'step down' or 'stand down' support should be user-led, and that the option of reactivating Housing First support should remain open.

## 5. Service User Experiences

### 5.1 Introduction

Drawing upon the interviews with individuals being supported by the Pathfinders, this chapter gives an overview of service users' early experiences of Housing First. It opens with a brief description of the characteristics of those interviewed. This is followed by an account of their initial reactions to an offer of Housing First, their experiences of Housing First support, their views of the housing provided, and the effect that Housing First has had on their lives to date.

### 5.2 Interviewee characteristics

As noted in Chapter 1, a total of 29 Housing First participants across the Pathfinders participated in the process evaluation's wave one interviews. The sample size in each Pathfinder was calculated on a broadly pro rata quota basis reflecting the proportion of total numbers supported by each at the time, such that 10 were based in Glasgow, 8 in Edinburgh, 6 in Dundee, 4 in Aberdeen/shire, and 1 in Stirling. A total of 21 service user interviewees were male and 8 female. Their ages ranged from 18 to 62 years. The majority of female participants were in the 30-39 age range, with most male participants aged 30-39 or 40-49 years. Their experiences of homelessness varied in that six had experienced sleeping rough in the very recent past whilst others (including those who had slept rough) described cycling between hostels (N=17), bed and breakfast (B&Bs), temporary furnished flats (N=3), rehabilitation units and sofa surfing (N=2), and supported accommodation and resettlement centres (N=5).

All of the service users interviewed had experience of severe and/or multiple forms of disadvantage. A few described themselves as having had long standing issues with alcohol, and many were past or current users of illicit drugs such as heroin or crack cocaine, consumed prescription drugs (e.g. Valium or diazepam) for non-medical purposes, and/or described themselves as polysubstance users. Many were currently undergoing treatment for an addiction (e.g. opioid replacement therapy). A substantial proportion had had some contact with the criminal justice system, and often also experience of prison sentences. Many also had long standing issues with their mental health and almost all described problems with their physical health.

The vast majority of participants had been moved into their Housing First tenancies when interviewed; almost all were housed within the social rented sector, with just one participant housed within the private rented sector. One person was living within a hostel whilst awaiting allocation of a Housing First tenancy at the point of interview.

### 5.3 Initial impressions

Many of the Housing First participants initially heard about the Housing First Pathfinder during their stay within temporary accommodation (hostel or supported accommodation) and were referred by their support worker (N=10). There was a slightly smaller group (N=6) who had heard about the Pathfinder through speaking with other service users and decided to self-refer (two of whom did so with the help of their CPN); and the same number (N=6) were referred through criminal justice services (usually social workers). A smaller group again (N=4) were referred through Housing Options teams and one was referred through their addiction worker (N=1). Two of the participants (N=2) did not speak directly to the question of how they had been referred onto the programme.

It should be noted that two individuals had been unaware that a referral had been made on their behalf. Whereas one of these individuals thought Housing First *“sounded like a good option”* once they had spoken with the Housing First worker, the other recounted being annoyed that the Housing First worker was knocking uninvited on their door. The Housing First worker had eventually caught up with him while he was attending a court case and the interviewee was ultimately happy to receive support. These experiences, together with others recounted by frontline staff (see s.4.3), emphasise the importance of discussing potential referral with and gaining consent from individuals targeted for Housing First before contact is made with them.

Service user interviewees' initial impressions regarding Housing First varied. Approximately two thirds of those discussing this issue described being positive or optimistic about the opportunities it presented. For example some noted that: *“It sounded a good option”*; *“I liked the sound of it”*; *“...a great idea...”*; *“a good idea actually”*; *“I thought it [sounded] good”*. For one participant, positive feedback from other people using it had encouraged him to accept an offer of Housing First: *“Some people in town were raving about it...”*. One saw it as a perfect fit for his own situation: *“[Housing First sounded] great, what I've been looking for...a solution for me...”*.

In contrast, approximately one third of service user interviewees recounted a more reserved or reticent view when they were first offered Housing First. One for example, described being wary of working with a new support worker: *“I was wary at first ...I hate working with new people...”*. In a similar vein, another participant's previous negative experiences of support caused him to doubt that Housing First would be any different: *“I was anxious to begin with. I didn't have great support workers in the past.”* Others were less explicit about the reasons underpinning their reservations: *“I didn't know what to think...I was dubious of it...”* and another just: *“I wasn't sure”*. Some assumed and expected that they would be let down by Housing First as they had other services in the past: *“It was too good to be true”*, *“Sounded too good to be true”* and *“[I] didn't believe it”*.

## 5.4 Experiences of support

This section reviews service user interviewees' views regarding: firstly, the type, volume and intensity of support provided; and secondly, the distinguishing features of Housing First and effects that those had on their experiences.

### 5.4.1 Type, volume and quality of support

Service user interviewees had received support in relation to a very wide range of practical tasks that were either directly or indirectly associated with sourcing a property and setting up a home. Examples included assistance with welfare benefits, bidding for houses, applying for grants, sourcing furnishings, setting up utilities, dealing with bills, and budgeting. Help with these tasks had been appreciated and was often said to have greatly alleviated the potential stress of moving into a tenancy.

*[I've had support] in terms of budgeting, advice about budgeting, electricity, gas, what do I need for a house, I've never had a house, I know I need a couch, I need a telly, I need a bed, I need a chest of drawers. People might say these are basic things, black bags for my bins, mop buckets, brushes, hoovers, extra bedding, curtains, lampshades...I never thought, I need lampshades...I forgot about towels. (Service user, Glasgow)*

*it's made it a lot easier, it's took a lot of stress and that off me like so I was saying like phoning these electricity companies to get my electricity switched to my*

*name and phoning up my Council Tax, chasing me already for money so that was the time I was going raj at them... they've took a lot of the stress off me so it's sort of not feeling so many of the panic attacks and that. (Service user, Edinburgh)*

Many interviewees also highlighted the value of the emotional support provided by their support worker, both in the lead-up and after being housed. They often emphasised the apparent care, commitment and non-judgementalism exhibited by staff in so doing.

*She [support worker] can walk with me as long as I want and I've got someone to turn to when I'm frustrated ... I feel like I've got someone there for me, someone cares. (Service user, Edinburgh)*

*It's not only like - they're actually checking on you all the time ... asking how I'm doing ... you can feel like people really care. (Service user, Aberdeen/shire)*

Some also highlighted the roles that Housing First workers has played in linking them into other services. A number had been physically accompanied by support workers to external appointments and noted that their presence had had a positive impact on the responses of other agencies.

*They're also helping me with the doctor because when I start to have depression, they actually arrange everything. You know, I got to doctor, now I'm on the medications. They also help me get a...counsellor. (Service user, Aberdeen/shire)*

*They [other agencies] probably listen more. All the agencies have joined up more, with each other ... I didn't see a worker for over two years, and then [my Housing First support worker] comes along and, 'Oh, here you go, here's your worker, you come out of hospital, here's an appointment...' They've just not bothered with me for a few years. (Service user, Dundee)*

Some interviewees described the role that Housing First support workers had played in linking them into activities within their community.

*They help me with my recovery groups as well: they got me a printout for all the recovery cafés and took me to a couple of recovery meetings and stuff - that was before I got the flat as well - took me to a few recovery meetings ... I love cooking - so it was somebody that was coming in doing a cooking class. Then she got me involved in a cooking class ... yes, it was good. (Service user, Glasgow)*

Many interviewees emphasised the value of knowing that Housing First support was available for as long as it was needed. For example, one explained that: “they've just stayed with me the whole time...I'm grateful for that...”. A few however noted that they had become less reliant on the support provided over time as their confidence increased.

*[Name of support worker] used to take me to all my appointments, but I don't need that support now... I said, 'Can you take a step back to let me try and do it myself?' Obviously, I still have his support at the side, but it helps me a bit, getting to the role of actually going out to the big bad world myself, do you know what I mean? (Service user, Aberdeen/shire)*

The majority of service user interviewees were satisfied with the amount of support they received and felt they were able to access support when they wanted it.

*There were periods last year where I was struggling, even before I moved into the house, and I knew it was a good thing that somebody was at the other end of the phone, and potentially if I wanted to see somebody in person, there was always somebody available. If it wasn't the worker you were working with directly, there was always somebody else available. (Service user, Glasgow)*

That said, a few noted that they would prefer to have more contact with their Housing First worker but felt unable to ask for additional support given an impression that their worker was already over-committed. This was a particular issue in Glasgow given that the Pathfinder was understaffed at the point of fieldwork.

*It seems to be as if they're always run off their feet and they can't seem to fit you in, do you know what I mean? It's sort of the bare minimum support you're getting, I think. (Service user, Glasgow).*

*Sometimes trying to get hold of the workers can be, it's not so much now, but, a bit difficult ... Then ... you hear people's caseloads, and you go, alright, so it's not just me! (Service user, Glasgow)*

*[Support worker name is] able to come out and help me and take me to meetings and appointments and things like that, [but] only if he's got time on his hands. I think he should have more time on his hands. The work that, he's got quite a lot of workload... [I see him] maybe once or twice a week. I would think it would be better if I got to see him ... every day. (Service user, Dundee)*

The vast majority of interviewees considered their support worker to be extremely experienced and were more than satisfied with their professional competence.

*I probably trust them the most because ... [support worker] worked in addictions all her life, so she's got a lot of experience and I feel there's a connection on that level, and also the fact that they've been coming out consistently, that made me trust them. (Service user, Glasgow)*

One did however feel that their worker, who had previously worked in a different sector, lacked knowledge or experience in relation to a particular issue they had and/or would benefit from additional training in specific areas, such as welfare benefits for example.

*I think some of the workers should be a bit more trained up on what they're going to be doing, because ... If you're with a worker that's not got a clue, you're not benefitting out of that. Maybe there's things that worker should be doing for you, or could be doing, but because they doesn't know that type of thing then ... you're losing out. (Service user, Glasgow)*

Several interviewees talked at length about how hard they normally found it to develop relationships with and trust in other people. For them, there were substantial benefits to having a named and trusted Housing First worker broker access to other services on their behalf.

*A lot of people, especially in addiction, don't want to go to all these different agencies and work with all these different workers because they feel like, 'Oh, here's another worker'. So the fact that Housing First is with one worker across the board, and they'll take you to appointments ... you feel safer because you've built up a relationship with that one worker, the one worker's getting it done for you. (Service user, Dundee)*

The majority of the interviewees had just one named support worker but often with another (or a few) worker(s) that they had met that could pick up their support if their usual worker was unavailable (e.g. on leave or ill). A very small number of the participants had changed worker when they had not got on well with the first support worker allocated. In each of these cases, the second relationship had been much more positive and all interviewees reported that they got on well with their current worker. These experiences serve to emphasise that swapping workers is necessary on occasion and Housing First projects should always enable this.

#### 5.4.2 Distinguishing features of Housing First support

When discussing their experiences of Housing First support, service users tended to pick up on one or more of four features which, in their view, made the Pathfinders distinctive from other services they had previously used and had been key to the approach 'working' for them. The first of these was the *relationality* of Housing First support, that is, what service users perceived to be as more equal relationships with staff wherein their views were taken seriously and they were afforded a greater degree of choice and control over support delivery. This had a very positive influence on interviewees' levels of engagement.

*I don't like talking to strangers...It's not easy to spit things out to a strange face you don't know, but because I know all these people in Housing First...I can relate to them, and I can speak to them openly and freely...I had a CPN, but I didn't relate to them because they try and push you forward when you're not ready to go forward, and they don't listen to you and it's really difficult. (Service user, Edinburgh)*

*I had a bad reputation, a really bad reputation in all the [services]. All of them. None of them would work with me. It was like, 'Oh, [service user's name] no, no way!' But it was because they didn't listen ... they didn't take on what I would say. They would just - it was just, 'She is an aggressive girl,' but they made me the aggressor by not listening to me ... So then I met [Housing First support worker] and that...was really the first one [to listen]. (Service user, Dundee)*

Secondly, the '*stickability*' of Housing First support, that is, the fact that support is not discontinued after incidents of disengagement or housing abandonment for example, was another key feature that service users frequently highlighted. This enabled them to have 'honest' and meaningful conversations which fostered their recovery.

*Housing First have been there the whole time. They're the only consistent service that have stayed with me and came out to see me every week, regardless... regardless of what's happened, they've always come out to see me... I've never experienced that. (Service user, Glasgow)*

*They are the best ones I have ever worked with...Because they are willing to go the extra mile to help you. They are willing to be there for you when you need,*

*even if it's just to talk. They are willing to do anything...they will never give up on you, even if you give up on them, they'll still be there for you. (Service user, Dundee)*

*She says, if you have a relapse, don't worry, you can tell me. I know I can. I've says to her before, I used last night, I used a couple of weeks ago, whatever. If I was still in [hostel]...there were times when I got told, if you do it one more time, you're out ... I couldn't be honest with them, but I could always be honest with [name of Housing First support worker]. (Service user, Glasgow)*

Thirdly, the *flexibility* of Housing First support, in that the type, location and intensity of support delivery can change in accordance with any alternation to an individual's needs and preferences, was seen as distinctive and welcomed. This was regarded as key to fostering both continued engagement with support and tenancy sustainment.

*I don't get things done to me anymore ... I've got total freedom. I could get as much support as I want from my support worker or I could get as little as I want, it's entirely up to me ... because he's there for us. (Service user, Dundee)*

*If I need her there, she's there. If I need a wee couple of days to myself, I'll just say to [my support worker], 'I'll see you on this date,' and she looks to see if she's free.... We both choose, we both talk about everything. (Service user, Glasgow)*

Fourth, participants highlighted the *longevity* of support, that is, the fact that it is not time limited. The reassurance that support would be there for as long as they needed it reduced levels of anxiety about what would happen in the long term.

*It just made a big difference in the fact, so now that I've got my tenancy, I still know that it's not like, 'There's your tenancy, see you later'. It's like the support's ongoing ... Just having that there is like that safety blanket ... It's good. (Service user, Glasgow)*

*I went in ... I'm like, 'Right, how long are you going to be here? How long are you - you want to listen to the story, then ... you are going to leave in three months, and I am going to have to go through it all again. I had a really bad attitude ... and I done the same with [Housing First Support worker]. 'When are you going to leave?' ... But they haven't. (Service user, Dundee)*

*I was used to workers coming for a bit then leaving...it takes me a while to trust people. It actually took me over a year to properly trust [my support worker] because I thought 'Oh, well, she's going to be with me for a wee while then leave'. So it took me a while to build that trust up with her. (Service user, Edinburgh)*

## 5.5 Experiences of housing

### 5.5.1 Choice of housing and furnishings

The vast majority of participants felt that they had been given a reasonable degree of choice over their housing, insofar as local housing markets allowed. Interviewees explained that when exercising choice they balanced different factors, most commonly preferred location and the likely

length of time they would have to wait for an offer of housing. Some prioritised location over wait; others wait over location.

*[My support worker asked me] 'where do you want to be?' and I said, '[area].'* ...  
*As soon as I said it, I thought, I'm not going to get [area]; [This area]'s quite a [hard] place to get into'... Then ... they phoned me and said they had the offer for me. I was like, 'Oh, in [chosen area]?' I was like, 'I'll take it!' ... I went there and viewed it, and it was beautiful. It was just lovely... (Service user, Glasgow)*

*When I look back now, I'm glad that it panned out the way it did [even with a long wait] because I got a flat where I wanted it. I was really fortunate...Really close to the city centre, really quite close... Looking back, I'm glad [my support worker] was saying...don't worry, we'll get it. It got to a stage, I says, 'get me anywhere'. She went, 'no, that's the last thing you want to do'... [eventually] they offered me a really nice flat in a nice area. (Service user, Glasgow)*

For others, it was the type of housing or specific characteristics of a property that were seen as of primary importance.

*I wanted a new build. That's what I told my support worker, all I want is a new build and I didn't care what area. I thought everywhere I could survive, so I picked this one and I've got this one and it's got an amazing view of the sea. I'm just chuffed with my new place. (Service user, Edinburgh)*

*I was quite specific that I wanted to get a ground floor flat because I have walking difficulties...I live on a wee, quiet dead-end street; lovely neighbours and I've landed on my feet. (Service user, Edinburgh)*

Some participants explained that they took the first property that was offered to them within their area of choice, but one that felt they did not have choice but took the first offer given concern that they would not be offered another.

*I had several areas that I put down for, but that was the first one that came up and because it came up on the right [area]. Just by luck, that's where the flat was at that end. Then, when I viewed it, I was pretty taken aback. I was like, 'This is perfect.' (Service user, Glasgow).*

*To be honest, I didn't have a lot of choice. I just got offered it and then when I was in [the hostel] they said to me if I didn't take the house that I got offered, that I wouldn't get offered another one. To be honest with you, this house is really quite a nice area, the neighbours are lovely, so I can't complain. (Service user, Dundee)*

The provision of a personal budget allowing service users to choose furnishings had been extremely well received by interviewees. This was said to have been highly beneficial in the process of making a home which, for some, provided a welcome focus.

*Housing First gave me a grant, and I haven't spent it all because I don't need to. I'm quite happy with what I've achieved and got ... I've got to write a...list and it's silly things you don't think about you need.... Like woks, and soup pots and toilet roll holders, and toilet brush...Everything's carpeted now. I'm fully fitted out. I'm hunky-dory Balamory...! (Service user, Edinburgh)*

*I've got a £1,500 grant... to go and get furniture, so that helped me a really, really lot...I'd set a date with [my support worker] ... We'd meet in the city centre and we'd go shopping. We'd get it delivered to the house ... Mostly second-hand shops ... It was brilliant fun. (Service user, Glasgow)*

### 5.5.2 Length of time taken to access housing

The length of time taken to receive an offer of a Housing First tenancy was highly variable, even at the Pathfinder level. For a few interviewees, most of whom had not been specific about preferred areas, the process had been relatively quick.

*I only waited, I think it was five weeks... They turned around and says to me, 'Whereabouts do you want to go?' I said, 'Well, I'd like anywhere providing there's a lift. She goes, 'Right, I think we've got a wee place for you,' and she took us up to [area]. As I said, I fell in love with the place, because it was high enough and Tesco's is only five minutes up the road. (Service user, Glasgow)*

Others, however, most but not all of whom had been very specific about their preferred area(s) or property attributes, had to wait several months. For some, the decision to prioritise location or property type over likely speed of housing was a deliberate choice and the delay, whilst frustrating, was not entirely unexpected.

*It took me quite a while because I didn't have many areas putting in. I only wanted certain places ... I was waiting about six or seven months in total. (Service user, Glasgow)*

For others, the wait was described as demoralising and/or demotivating. This was especially true of one interviewee in Edinburgh who understood that their bid had been bypassed multiple times by housing providers (see s.4.4.1).

*I think it was about eight or nine months ... I started to be impatient a wee bit as well...I was getting itchy feet, I just wanted somewhere to stay. (Service user, Glasgow)*

*It took ages ... it took a good while to get this place, seven month... I was ready to chuck it in because it got to seven month and I kept having these meeting with her [support worker] and I'm like, 'Any news?' 'Nothing yet, nothing yet, nothing yet' and I was just losing patience. Then one day I got a call and she says, 'We've got a lovely little flat for you to look at.' (Service user, Edinburgh)*

### 5.5.3 Satisfaction with home and neighbourhood

The vast majority of interviewees who had been housed reported high levels of satisfaction with, and indeed often substantial pride in, their home.

*I spent £400 on appliances and I got myself a £130 table for my dining table, so it's like a proper decent home. I love it and my cat is happy and I'm happy. (Service user, Edinburgh)*

*I'm dead proud of my wee flat because it's lovely and I keep it spotless. (Service user, Glasgow)*

*[I'm] highly motivated to do things, get things for the flat, get pictures up ... to make it a home... I'm taking pride in cleanliness, the flat's spotless, I've got myself a new modern Hoover, cordless. (Service user, Dundee)*

Levels of satisfaction with their neighbourhood were also generally high on balance, with many interviewees commenting on attributes such as how quiet the area was.

*It's really quiet and I don't get no bother. I didn't want a ground floor flat and they got me on the top floor, on the landing, so they've done everything for me, really. (Service user, Aberdeen/shire)*

*I chose the area myself because I wanted round about [the] city centre... my ma and da only stay like ten minutes away ... Where I'm at the now and that, I'm happy. I didn't like it to start with, obviously because it's up high flats, like maisonettes, but since I've moved in and that, it's just dead peaceful... (Service user, Glasgow)*

That said, a very small number of participants reported that whilst they felt safe within their home they were not entirely satisfied with their neighbourhood due to the prevalence of antisocial behaviour locally. One was looking to be moved as a consequence.

*I can't go for a walk with my dog out where I'm staying, because of all the carry on that goes on here, it's like living in a warzone, living here. (Service user, Dundee)*

#### 5.5.4 Door management

Many of the participants had either encountered difficulties managing their door when they had held tenancies in the past, and/or were cognisant of the risk that inviting other people into their current home might present to their recovery from addiction. The majority of these individuals had elected to be very selective about who they allowed into their homes as a result.

*I don't have anybody at the door. My policy is just now the only people that I let in the flat is [support worker] or [one personal friend]... (Service user, Dundee).*

*I always swore that there was only certain people getting to know where I lived because I don't want to go back down that road because I've spent so many years on the street. I've met a lot of not very nice...people. (Service user, Edinburgh)*

*To be honest with you, I don't tell a lot of people where I stay. The reason is I don't want people that maybe I used to frequent with...bringing in whatever ... I want my house to be drug-free basically... I'm stable on my methadone script... I don't want anybody to come up that could jeopardise [that]. (Service user, Glasgow)*

That said, one interviewee's reflection that "I've got crack dealers that are like family to us" (Service user, Dundee) highlights the extent of challenge that some service users and their support workers face when it comes to the issue of door management. That particular individual had been moved out

of their tenancy at the point of interview with the support of their Housing First worker after it was taken over by people involved in drugs networks. Intensive support was being received to reduce the likelihood of such an incidence reoccurring.

## 5.6 Early impacts

Service user interviewees reported that the impacts of Housing First on their lives to date had been hugely positive and wide ranging; no interviewees reported any negative impacts resulting from their engagement with Housing First. A key impact for all those housed had been the resolution of homelessness, the experiences of which for some had been very long-standing and/or repetitive.

*The impact that it's had on my life is getting a house and having support while I'm in that house, just knowing that, even when I don't need to use it ... it's there can make me do things differently and behave differently, and be more positive and more hopeful ... I reflect on it and I go, I've been doing alright recently, why have I been doing alright? Well ... the biggest reason, I've got a house and I'm away from homelessness. (Service user, Glasgow)*

A number of interviewees attributed improvements in their physical health to their involvement with Housing First, typically as a result of support workers' proactive facilitation of access to healthcare, the option of being accompanied to medical appointments, and/or enhanced capacity to prioritise their own health after obtaining settled housing.

*[I've had] support taking me to appointments when I felt anxious about going ... because when you're on a prescription and you've got to see a GP, your addiction worker, you need to go to [homelessness clinic] and all the homeless people go there, and it's very chaotic, a very lively place. (Service user, Glasgow)*

*People have seen me in the street and never noticed me, don't know who I am, until I tell them and they're like, 'Oh my god, you look so different.' Because I am not taking all the drugs, because I'm ... healthier. (Service user, Dundee)*

Improvements in mental health were also very commonly reported. These were attributed, in some cases, to being supported to access mental health services, but just as if not more commonly to the kindness of staff and/or the security (of both housing and support) offered by Housing First.

*I've not actually felt that highly strung in a long time now, now that I've been able to talk my problems through and deal with, instead of, 'Argh!' just shouting and bawling. Honestly, my family see it; they see a pure big difference in me - I'm on the right medication and that. (Service user, Glasgow)*

*They have lifted my spirit ... All the money they've spent on me, the person who's there to help, so much help and being kind and cheery, it helped with my mental health and it done a lot for me, a lot. Now, I'm looking forward to getting back to do something with my life, like get back to education or get back to training for work or something, and I was not feeling like that before. (Service user, Edinburgh)*

*It's given me a chance at another life, because as I say, if they weren't there for me, they helped me with my housing the now, I would have took my own life. That's what I was going to do. See, if they were putting me back on the street, I*

*wouldn't have been able to cope any more.... so they gave me another chance.  
(Service user, Glasgow)*

Those mental health benefits, and/or encouragement and support to access addiction services, had helped some interviewees reduce their levels of involvement in substance misuse and/or severity of dependency.

*I had drug issues at one point, and I had to go to [clinic]...to be put on a methadone script and [my support worker has] helped me through that. He used to pick me up every day and basically helped me through my issues. He actually helped me recover and now I no longer need help with it. (Service user, Aberdeen/shire)*

*To me, after so long feeling that nobody cares, when you've got that somebody that's got the time to spend with you, just psychologically you feel better ... just to know that somebody cares can actually ... give you some hope, and when you've got hope, you do a bit better ... My experience has been when I've got no hope, I'll just keep using drugs ... It's the only thing that numbs the pain I'm feeling... (Service user, Glasgow)*

Given these impacts, almost all of the interviewees said that they would recommend Housing First to other people. Some had even gone as far as brokering referrals for others or recommending the approach to peers.

*I've been in [this city] born and bred and I have been homeless when I was younger, and I've never, ever had any support like what I've got with Housing First. I think it's an amazing scheme to help people to restore their confidence. Just to get a bit of dignity back. (Service user, Edinburgh)*

*Housing First's made a big difference to my life. If it wasn't for Housing First and [Support Worker] getting me the house then, I'd still be [homeless]...and I wouldn't have my independence and my freedom. If it wasn't for Housing First, I don't know where I'd be, so the programme is working. (Service user, Glasgow)*

Some service user interviewees described the overall effect of Housing First on their lives as transformational. In this vein, several drew attention to the opportunities that having a stable home opened up to do so-called 'normal' things, including pursuing recreational activities and spending time with family for example.

*It's totally transformed my life ... It's given me something that I want to really hold on to ... I'm over the moon with it [my flat] and I'm not letting it go easy ... Now, I'd say my life is going really well and ... without having that flat I wouldn't be like that ... I'd still be basically either in and out of the hostel system ... Aye, the flat has made a huge difference to my life, a massive difference. Just having that house that I can go to, knowing it's mine. I know I'm safe there and even if I'm not doing anything, I can just sit back, chill, watch the telly and stuff like that, even just something like that; that's a lot to me. (Service user, Glasgow)*

*My house is amazing now ... I've got it the way I want it to be... I can just kick back and watch the telly instead of going out doing daft stuff, committing crime or*

*whatever. I can get my daughter down, spend time with her. Get my family up.  
(Service user, Glasgow)*

## 5.7 Conclusion

Service user interviewees' experiences of the Pathfinders had been extremely positive on balance. Levels of satisfaction with support and housing were generally very high, albeit that a small minority of interviewees (almost all of whom were being supported by the Pathfinder with higher than intended caseloads) felt that they would benefit from a higher level of support.

Efforts to reduce waiting times for housing would also be welcomed in some areas given the demoralising effect of lengthy delays for some individuals. That said, reducing waiting times may be extremely difficult in some cases given that in exercising user choice some individuals actively prioritise location (e.g. proximity to family or amenities) or specific property attributes (e.g. multi-storey level, age of building, or access to garden) over the likely time taken to obtain a housing offer.

Interviewees noted that the relationality, stickability, flexibility and longevity of Housing First support set it apart from other services that they had used in the past and had been pivotal to its effectiveness for them personally. These service attributes had facilitated levels of engagement with support, aided tenancy sustainment, and fostered recovery from addiction and poor mental health.

A number of positive impacts on service user interviewees' lives were described, including the resolution of long-term or repeat episodes of homelessness, improved physical health, improved mental health, and reductions in substance misuse/dependency. For some, the effects were described as transformational.

## 6. Conclusion

Scotland's Housing First Pathfinder, operational from April 2019 until March 2022, is serving as a key litmus test regarding the opportunities and challenges involved in scaling up Housing First as it increasingly becomes the default response for homeless people with complex needs across Scotland. In reviewing the achievements and barriers encountered during the design, mobilisation and early implementation stages of the programme, this interim report has documented the Pathfinder projects' early successes and lessons learned as they have supported members of the target population to access and sustain settled housing.

Whilst it presents key tenancy sustainment and basic unit cost figures for each of the five Pathfinders to date, this interim report has otherwise focused on interview data from (the first of two waves of) the *process* thread of the evaluation. Data collection relating to other (non-housing) outcomes for service users (e.g. health, substance misuse, financial wellbeing etc.) has been delayed by the COVID-19 pandemic, hence full findings from the *outcomes* and *cost-benefit* threads of the study will be reported in future outputs (see Chapter 1).

### 6.1 Initial achievements, programme fidelity, and unit costs

By the end of June 2021, 531 individuals had been housed by the Pathfinders, the vast majority (98%) of whom were allocated tenancies in social housing. A total of 84% of the individuals who had been housed one year or longer ago had sustained their tenancy, and 82% of those housed two years or longer ago had sustained their tenancies. No evictions had been recorded to date. These tenancy sustainment rates are commensurate with those recorded elsewhere internationally, despite the Pathfinders having operated in the context of a global pandemic and associated restrictions for more than a year.

Service user interviewees' experiences of the Pathfinders have been extremely positive on balance. They described a range of positive impacts, including the resolution of long-term or repeat episodes of homelessness, improved physical health, improved mental health, and reductions in substance misuse and/or dependency. Some reported that Housing First had had a transformational effect on their lives. The services users interviewed noted that the Pathfinders' relationality, stickability, flexibility and longevity set Housing First apart from other services and, furthermore, that these attributes had facilitated levels of engagement with support, aided tenancy sustainment, and fostered recovery from addiction and poor mental health.

Preliminary findings indicate that Housing First provision can be successfully scaled up, and relatively quickly so, even in areas where housing supply is constrained. The process of scaling up is more difficult in contexts with large and/or complex systems involving many different stakeholders (as is the case in Glasgow for example); and comparatively easier in smaller centres where fewer relationships need to be developed and/or organisational procedures adapted or integrated. The location and nature of potential 'sticking points' in attempts to scale up vary depending on factors such as consortium size and configuration, degree and nature of involvement of statutory bodies (most notably councils and HSCPs), and local housing market conditions.

Almost all Pathfinders have succeeded in operationalising the majority, if not all, of the seven core principles of Housing First to either a high or high/medium degree. Where they have occurred, departures from these principles have resulted from either: a) deviations in programme design (e.g. requirements that service users exhibit commitment to engaging with Housing First support, as in Dundee); or b) the effects of (external or internal) factors which have inhibited Pathfinders' ability to

deliver the service in the way intended (e.g. the bypassing of Housing First clients by RSLs, as in Edinburgh, and restricted capacity of frontline workers to deliver sufficiently flexible support due to staff shortages, as in Glasgow).

Also affecting fidelity, the absence of certainty regarding the continuation of funding after the transition period has meant that none of the Pathfinders has been able to give service users total assurance regarding the open-endedness of support. Furthermore, it was clear that where caseloads have (unintentionally) exceeded the widely endorsed ideal maximum of seven, staff have been unable to commit the time required to operationalise a number of other principles, such as the use of active engagement approaches, supporting service users to identify their strengths and meet their goals and aspirations, and promotion of harm reduction.

Whilst the need to implement the Housing First approach in slightly different ways in different local contexts is widely acknowledged, there is a strong call for the preservation of commitment to fidelity as Housing First is rolled out more widely across Scotland. Concerns regarding three potential threats to fidelity going forward are particularly prominent. These include risks that: a) sufficiently low staff caseloads will be jeopardised; b) limits may be imposed on the length of time that service users are able to receive Housing First support; and c) the separation of housing and support may be compromised if local authorities take Housing First provision 'in house'.

A number of factors have facilitated the mobilisation and early implementation of the Pathfinders to date. Key amongst these have been: strong political commitment to Housing First at national and local levels (evidenced via RRTP requirements and development, for example); a high level of buy-in from a number of key housing providers in Pathfinder areas; access to training on Housing First's key principles and their translation into practice delivered by the Housing First Academy Training Hub; opportunities for shared learning via the Housing First Scotland Connect events; and examples of effective multi-agency joint working at the local level.

Factors inhibiting Pathfinder development and delivery have included, amongst others: the limited supply of suitable housing in some areas; delays accessing SWF grants for furnishing; miscommunication regarding targets in some areas; limited understanding of and/or buy-in to Housing First amongst some housing providers (which has led to the bypassing of service users in Edinburgh, for example); divergent levels of risk appetite amongst key stakeholders; difficulties brokering access to healthcare and/or other services; and the limitations placed on face-to-face support delivery during the pandemic.

In terms of the costs of Housing First, when direct costs to Pathfinder consortia (only) are considered, the overall average annual unit cost of the Pathfinders by 2020/21 year end was £10,981 per person housed (and £7,645 per person supported). If key partner costs are included (that is, Pathfinder fund and project management roles provided by Corra Foundation and Homeless Network Scotland respectively, as well as with the provision of training by Turning Point Scotland), the average annual unit cost at 2020/21 year end was £12,088 per person housed (or £8,415 per person supported). The unit costs recorded have reduced year on year since the Pathfinder programme began.

## 6.2 Key lessons learned and forward-looking reflections

A number of key lessons have been learned as regards the design and mobilisation of Housing First. Crucially, evaluation evidence collated to date indicates that time spent developing partnerships with key stakeholders across all relevant sectors (most notably housing providers, but also those in health and social care, and criminal justice), is time well invested. Further to this, attempts to foster

buy-in from stakeholders should ideally target individuals in frontline roles (e.g. housing officers) as well as those operating at a strategic level. Ideally, clarity should be established between all stakeholders regarding their respective roles and responsibilities from the outset, albeit in practice at least some degree of subsequent learning will occur and modification to protocols be required. Stakeholders should also expect that the nature and location of 'sticking points' will shift during the mobilisation and early implementation of Housing First services.

Findings to date indicate that the development of a shared long-term vision, collective approach to problem solving, and clear communication amongst stakeholders (again, across all levels of seniority) are helpful during the development and mobilisation of new Housing First services. Building the capacity required for change has been neither easy nor quick, but an openness to making adaptations when things have not worked has been constructive. The Pathfinders' experiences indicate that there is substantial value in allowing space for and encouraging open discussion, such that all stakeholders are fully cognisant of one another's obligations (e.g. statutory duties) and/or concerns. Commitment to the co-production of solutions is invaluable where levels of risk appetite are widely divergent.

Dissonance between the flexible approach adopted by Housing First and comparative inflexibility of many of the systems that it works within and alongside presents an ongoing challenge for Housing First practitioners. Brokering access to mental health services has been particularly difficult. Existing calls<sup>48</sup> for broader systems change to address access barriers continue, albeit allied with a recognition of the need for further thought regarding the implications of Housing First roll-out for the statutory obligations of some stakeholders toward especially vulnerable members of the target population<sup>49</sup>. The successful removal of some barriers enabling clients to continue to access essential health and other services during the pandemic gives at least some grounds for optimism regarding the opportunities for positive change in this area.

Key lessons regarding referral processes have included the importance of ensuring that eligibility criteria are clear and communicated effectively to referral agents, that targeted individuals should be made aware of and consent to their referral to Housing First, and that a tool such as the NDT, whilst imperfect, is helpful in prioritising referrals. Further to this, there is clear value in having multi-agency input into referral assessments, but support providers should always be involved in decisions regarding whether Housing First might be suitable for any particular individual referred. This is especially critical where there is clear disparity in the nature and/or or degree of risk appetite amongst key stakeholders.

The Pathfinders' experiences to date indicate that there is clear value in and demand for the continuation of a national forum akin to the Connect events hosted by Homeless Network Scotland given the opportunities they have presented for learning and good practice to be shared. Similarly, there is appetite for ongoing (and potentially upscaled) provision of Housing First training, in both the core principles and their translation into practice for provider managers and frontline staff, but also more general introductory courses for external stakeholders. If possible, the combination of general introductory courses with locality-specific information and training sessions covering local processes (e.g. referral, assessment and allocations etc.) would be welcomed.

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<sup>48</sup> Bramley, G., Fitzpatrick, S., Wood, J., Sosenko, F., Blenkinsopp, J., Littlewood, M., Frew, C., Bashar, T., McIntyre, J. and Johnsen, S. (2019) *Hard Edges Scotland: new conversations about severe and multiple disadvantage*. Lankelly Chase and The Robertson Trust, London.

<sup>49</sup> Reid, B. (2021) *Preventing Homelessness in Scotland. Recommendations for legal duties to prevent homelessness: A report from the Prevention Review Group*. Edinburgh: Homelessness Prevention Review Group.

Regarding target group and service eligibility, early learning from the Pathfinder indicates that Housing First is not suitable for three particular groups: firstly, people who lack capacity to comprehend a standard tenancy agreement and/or the consequences of failing to adhere to its conditions (due to severe learning difficulties or alcohol related brain damage, for example); secondly, those who are so unwell that their healthcare needs exceed what can realistically be provided by Housing First; and thirdly, people who do not want Housing First. Alternative 24/7 intensive support interventions are needed for the first two of these groups, given that they require a care-led rather than housing-led solution<sup>50</sup>. Further thinking and evidence is required in order to identify the most appropriate intervention(s) for the third group. The same is true for the minority of individuals who have not been able to sustain tenancies even with Housing First support.

Interim evaluation findings also highlight a need to avoid insofar as possible use of terms that perpetuate misunderstandings regarding what Housing First is and who is likely to benefit from it. Key amongst these is the unhelpful description of an individual as 'not being ready' for Housing First when they simply do not want it, as this label can (quite understandably, but incorrectly) be misinterpreted as implying that someone has been deemed ineligible for Housing First on grounds of a lack of housing readiness. The same is true of the phrase 'support package', given its insinuation that the type and volume of support provided is predefined, which is incongruent with Housing First principles.

The COVID-19 pandemic and associated restrictions affected Pathfinder delivery in a number of ways, most notably necessitating remote contact with service users when face-to-face contact was not deemed absolutely essential. A key point of learning during this period has been that remote means of contact are welcomed by some service users but not others given differences in their personal preferences, access to communication technology, and/or confidence in using such technology. This being so, whilst remote contact is likely to be a feature of support delivery to at least some degree going forward, the Pathfinders' early experiences indicate that it should be regarded as a potential complement to rather than substitute for face-to-face contact.

Endeavours to combat social isolation and foster community integration are inter-related areas that have both been severely impaired by the pandemic, in large part due to social distancing measures and the (temporary) closure of many community facilities. There is widespread acknowledgement amongst stakeholders that this general area represents the 'nut that has not yet been cracked' by the Pathfinders, and that further thought and learning is required regarding how best to support Housing First tenants to (re)build positive social support networks and feel part of their local community.

Difficulties recruiting and retaining frontline staff have been encountered in some Pathfinder areas. A key point of learning has been the need to consider parity of salary and conditions where Housing First is delivered by consortia. Broader questions have also been raised regarding the adequacy of pay for Housing First support workers given the skills required and demands of their role. The provision of high quality supervisory support and regular opportunities for reflective practice were widely identified as being of critical importance. Furthermore, provision of clinical supervision opportunities is increasingly being endorsed as good practice given the risk of frontline staff being exposed to vicarious trauma and/or potential burnout.

Delays accessing furniture resulting, in large part, from issues associated with SWF applications had been a significant problem in some (but not all) Pathfinder areas. This had detrimentally affected some service users' moods and motivation at the point they moved into their new homes which was a concern for providers given the potential elevation of any risk of abandonment. There was a

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<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

strong call amongst frontline staff in particular for the SWF grant application processes to be made more efficient and/or for consideration to be given to the adoption of a 'grace period' of up to two weeks, potentially covered by a Two Homes Payment, enabling Housing First tenants to furnish and move into their homes without any risk of them having to occupy an unfurnished property.

Personalisation budgets allowing tenants to exercise choice when furnishing their homes had been very positively received by service user interviewees. Staff members involved in the administration of these budgets nevertheless called for further consideration and clarification regarding whether at least some of this (or additional) funding might be devoted to other things which may feasibly foster tenancy sustainment, combat social isolation, promote community integration, and/or support service users' pursual of other goals and aspirations.

That said, given the challenge involved in balancing the maximisation of user choice with regard to furnishings and minimisation of time taken to furnish properties, further reflection is needed regarding the advantages and disadvantages of offering furniture packages (which offer some albeit restricted choice of type and style), as used by the Stirling Pathfinder for example, versus the provision of personalisation budgets. Some providers are of the view that the use of furniture packages is an acceptable trade-off given the way these expedite the process of setting up new homes.

Incidents of anti-social behaviour wherein Housing First tenants had been either a victim or perpetrator (and in some cases both) had occurred in all Pathfinder areas but had been much less prevalent as a problem than had been anticipated by many stakeholders. Two key factors were deemed to have been effective in preventing and mitigating anti-social behaviour: firstly, rapid response to early signs of an issue developing; and secondly, effective joint working between key stakeholders. The housing and support elements of Housing First may be separate, but there is clear value in communication and partnership working between Housing First staff and housing officers in particular.

Further thought needs to be given to how Housing First clients might be most effectively protected from cuckooing perpetrated by associates of local and/or long-distance (county line) drugs networks. The utilisation of intelligence held by relevant stakeholders (e.g. housing officers) regarding particular neighbourhoods may help in mitigating risks associated with the former to at least some extent. On a related point, further reflection regarding the causes of and potential mitigations regarding drug-related deaths would be judicious, especially given the number of deaths of Housing First tenants occurring during the pandemic, at least some of which were attributed by interviewees to changes in local drugs markets.

Looking forward, further reflection is also needed regarding whether and in what circumstances it may be appropriate to reduce levels of ('step down') or potentially even end ('stand down') Housing First support if service users no longer require the flexibility and intensity of support the approach offers. There is a strong call amongst Housing First practitioners to ensure that any such transitions should be user led and that the option of reactivating Housing First support remain open given existing evidence that some individuals will require intensive support in the long term<sup>51</sup>. The support of staff in enabling service users to make informed choices about any potential transition away from Housing First, actively encouraging reflection on possible implications and risks, will be critical.

There is a shared ambition to increase the speed of property allocations insofar as is possible going forward, not least given evidence that lengthy delays can be demoralising for some Housing First

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<sup>51</sup> Homeless Link (2019) *Exploring Patterns of Housing First Support: resident journeys*. London: Homeless Link.

clients. That said, waiting times will be extremely difficult to reduce in some cases given that in exercising user choice some Housing First clients actively prioritise location (e.g. proximity to family or amenities) or property attributes (e.g. multi-storey level or access to garden), over the likely time taken to receive a housing offer. Key things to note on this issue are, firstly, that Housing First clients should not be disadvantaged within allocation systems, and secondly, appropriate temporary accommodation and support arrangements must be in place while service users await a property.

A final and crucial lesson learned has been the need to preserve small caseloads. Where the intended maximum of seven clients per staff member has been exceeded, support workers have been compelled to: a) focus on crisis resolution for a subset of their clients at the expense of the day-to-day support of others; and in so doing b) prioritise tenancy sustainment to the neglect of support relating to other areas of service users' lives (e.g. mental and physical health, social isolation, community integration etc.). Critically, clients affected by (unintentionally) high staff caseloads report feeling insufficiently supported. Also on the issue of caseloads, the initial experiences of providers indicate that a case might be made for even lower caseloads (of 1:5) in rural areas given the amount of staff time absorbed by travel.

Any additional learning regarding these and other issues will be reported in future evaluation outputs, together with the final outcomes for service users across a range of domains and the cost-benefit analysis results.

## Appendix 1: Number of individuals supported and housed, by Pathfinder, to end June 2021

MONTH	NUMBER OF PEOPLE SUPPORTED						NUMBER OF PEOPLE HOUSED					
	A/shire	Dundee	Edinburgh	Glasgow*	Stirling	TOTAL	A/shire	Dundee	Edinburgh	Glasgow*	Stirling	TOTAL
Sep-18	1	0	0	18 (0/18)	0	19	0	0	0	18 (0/18)	0	18
Oct-18	2	0	0	29 (2/27)	0	31	1	0	0	27 (0/27)	0	28
Nov-18	5	0	5	34 (6/28)	0	44	1	0	0	27 (0/27)	0	28
Dec-18	6	0	13	37 (7/30)	1	57	2	0	0	27 (0/27)	0	29
Jan-19	13	2	23	43 (12/31)	4	85	3	2	6	27 (0/27)	1	39
Feb-19	13	2	32	52 (20/32)	4	103	5	2	9	27 (0/27)	3	46
Mar-19	13	7	32	55 (21/34)	7	114	5	7	12	30 (1/29)	3	57
Apr-19	18	7	35	63 (25/38)	8	131	9	7	18	31 (2/29)	5	70
May-19	18	13	39	74 (33/41)	8	152	13	13	21	34 (6/28)	5	86
Jun-19	20	16	39	78 (35/43)	8	161	13	16	24	35 (7/28)	6	94
Jul-19	23	17	39	80 (37/43)	8	167	18	16	25	38 (9/29)	6	103
Aug-19	27	17	51	117 (59/58)	8	220	21	17	27	46 (13/33)	7	118
Sep-19	28	22	50	138 (73/65)	8	246	21	21	28	54 (19/35)	8	132
Oct-19	28	26	68	155 (80/75)	8	285	22	25	31	70 (26/44)	8	156
Nov-19	33	30	83	163 (90/73)	10	319	24	30	32	79 (33/46)	8	173
Dec-19	37	30	92	161 (89/72)	10	330	24	30	34	90 (41/49)	8	186
Jan-20	41	37	92	174 (102/72)	10	354	29	37	40	102 (47/55)	8	216
Feb-20	52	40	97	183 (110/73)	10	382	31	39	47	110 (49/61)	9	236
Mar-20	62	44	99	180 (105/75)	10	395	31	44	51	117 (56/61)	9	252
Apr-20	66	44	98	178 (105/73)	10	396	32	44	51	117 (56/61)	9	253
May-20	69	44	108	193 (123/70)	10	424	39	44	53	116 (56/60)	9	261
Jun-20	75	44	117	196 (127/69)	16	448	46	44	55	116 (56/60)	9	270
Jul-20	78	48	125	190 (125/65)	20	461	48	48	60	118 (57/61)	9	283
Aug-20	88	49	136	179 (114/65)	20	472	55	49	65	127 (63/64)	10	306
Sep-20	98	51	152	190 (125/65)	20	511	62	51	70	133 (67/66)	11	327
Oct-20	109	56	164	192 (125/67)	20	541	69	56	78	140 (72/68)	11	354
Nov-20	112	61	166	194 (128/66)	20	553	73	60	80	148 (80/68)	11	372
Dec-20	115	64	164	196 (127/69)	19	558	80	64	92	157 (87/70)	11	404
Jan-21	115	67	162	197 (127/70)	19	560	82	68	97	168 (95/73)	11	426
Feb-21	115	72	162	202 (127/75)	19	570	84	73	108	181 (106/75)	11	457
Mar-21	115	79	160	200 (124/76)	19	573	87	80	111	192 (116/76)	13	483
Apr-21							93	82	116	204	13	508
May-21							94	85	119	208	13	519
Jun-21							97	87	120	214	13	531

\* Bracketed figures for Glasgow show numbers relating to the Pathfinder consortium led by Turning Point Scotland and the commissioned Housing First service led by The Salvation Army respectively.

Source: Tracker monitoring data.

## Appendix 2: Tenancy sustainment, by Pathfinder, to end June 2021

The tables below present the housing status of individuals who had been housed at different timepoints, as at the end of June 2021. All figures are drawn from tracker monitoring data. The interim tenancy sustainment statistics presented in Chapter 3 provides cumulative totals based on the figures below.

### PATHFINDER TOTAL

Of those individuals who...	How many were...				
	Still housed in original HF tenancy	Housed in second HF tenancy	No longer housed in (any) HF tenancy	Deceased	Total
Were (first) housed <6 months ago	125	0	2	2	129
Were (first) housed 6-11 months ago	105	1	6	4	116
Were (first) housed 12-23 months ago	138	3	24	16	181
Were (first) housed 24+ months ago	75	2	17	11	105

### ABERDEEN

Of those individuals who...	How many were...				
	Still housed in original HF tenancy	Housed in second HF tenancy	No longer housed in (any) HF tenancy	Deceased	Total
Were (first) housed <6 months ago	26	0	0	1	27
Were (first) housed 6-11 months ago	31	0	0	1	32
Were (first) housed 12-23 months ago	21	0	2	2	25
Were (first) housed 24+ months ago	11	0	2	0	13

### DUNDEE

Of those individuals who...	How many were...				
	Still housed in original HF tenancy	Housed in second HF tenancy	No longer housed in (any) HF tenancy	Deceased	Total
Were (first) housed <6 months ago	21	0	0	0	21
Were (first) housed 6-11 months ago	17	0	0	1	18
Were (first) housed 12-23 months ago	25	1	2	3	31
Were (first) housed 24+ months ago	9	2	2	4	17

**EDINBURGH**

Of those individuals who...	How many were...				
	Still housed in original HF tenancy	Housed in second HF tenancy	No longer housed in (any) HF tenancy	Deceased	Total
Were (first) housed <6 months ago	24	0	1	1	26
Were (first) housed 6-11 months ago	24	0	2	1	27
Were (first) housed 12-23 months ago	30	2	6	1	39
Were (first) housed 24+ months ago	21	0	4	3	28

**GLASGOW\***

Of those individuals who...	How many were...				
	Still housed in original HF tenancy	Housed in second HF tenancy	No longer housed in (any) HF tenancy	Deceased	Total
Were (first) housed <6 months ago	52	0	1	0	53
Were (first) housed 6-11 months ago	33	1	4	1	39
Were (first) housed 12-23 months ago	59	0	13	9	81
Were (first) housed 24+ months ago	31	0	6	4	41

\* Includes figures for both the Pathfinder consortium led by Turning Point Scotland and the commissioned Housing First service led by The Salvation Army

**STIRLING**

Of those individuals who...	How many were...				
	Still housed in original HF tenancy	Housed in second HF tenancy	No longer housed in (any) HF tenancy	Deceased	Total
Were (first) housed <6 months ago	2	0	0	0	2
Were (first) housed 6-11 months ago	0	0	0	0	0
Were (first) housed 12-23 months ago	3	0	1	1	5
Were (first) housed 24+ months ago	3	0	3	0	6



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By Sarah Johnsen, Janice Blenkinsopp and Matthew Rayment

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