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# Scotland's Housing First Pathfinder Evaluation

## First Interim Report: Executive Summary

Sarah Johnsen, Janice Blenkinsopp and Matthew Rayment



## 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 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.

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

## 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**

	<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

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

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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.

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.

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.

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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.

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<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 by a Two Homes

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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.



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 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

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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>.

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 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.

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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.

<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.

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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