

**“It’s like a
dream come
true”**

An inquiry into scaling up Housing First in England



appg

for Ending Homelessness

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Foreword



Bob Blackman MP

As Co-Chairs of the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) for Ending Homelessness, we are pleased to introduce this report on the case for scaling up Housing First services across England.

During the past year or so, the world as we know it has changed and brought with it exceptional circumstances and unprecedented challenges to our communities. More than ever, the pandemic has demonstrated the necessity of everyone having access to a safe and secure home for our wellbeing and dignity. The Government's response to the pandemic through the Everyone In initiative and subsequent programmes showed us that with bold policy action, people experiencing homelessness or at risk can be protected and supported away from rough sleeping.



Neil Coyle MP

As our daily lives start to return back to normal, we cannot go back to business as usual with regards to homelessness. We must not forget the clear lesson of the pandemic: with sufficient political will and bold policy action we can make real progress towards ending homelessness in England once and for all.

One area that has clearly stood out as needing further action from the Government is investment in services that address homelessness in a sustainable and long-term way. While programmes such as the Rough Sleeping Accommodation Programme offer a lifeline to many, it falls short of what we know is needed for people with multiple and serious needs. Crucially, a considerable proportion of the people supported into safe accommodation across the country during Everyone In, and some who have become newly homeless since the pandemic began, will fall into this group. While welcome, support into temporary and intermediate accommodation is often unsuitable and fails to provide this group with adequate stability and support. Simply put, we end up managing people's homelessness, not ending it.

We know from people with lived experience of homelessness that Housing First can and does provide a sustainable route out of homelessness. During the APPG's inquiry we heard from over 65 people with direct experience of using Housing First. People shared their experiences and explained why Housing First has helped them rebuild a life away from homelessness, when other forms of support did not.

One individual's testimony particularly struck us both:

"With the help of my Housing First support worker I was able to address the problems I faced, I got help with my mental health and got clean from all drugs...I honestly believe if I wasn't introduced to Housing First and this program I wouldn't be here to tell any story."

Several other testimonies submitted to the APPG's inquiry by people with direct experience also shared this sentiment - that Housing First saved their life.

The Government has already demonstrated a welcome understanding of Housing First by investing in three city-region pilots in the Autumn Budget of 2017. However, this funding is due to end in 2022, and as it stands, there is no clarity about how the 1,100 Housing First places across these pilots will be financed past this point. This has generated a huge amount of apprehension and uncertainty for both providers and clients of these services.

We therefore call on the Government to use the opportunity of the upcoming Spending Review this autumn to demonstrate its commitment to Housing First and deliver the necessary funding to secure the future of these three city-region pilots. We also urge them to take the first steps towards scaling up Housing First nationally, by committing to funding the expansion of Housing First provision to other regions in England where there are high numbers of people with multiple and serious needs who are homeless, including people who may be sleeping rough, or people who have been supported into emergency and move-on accommodation throughout the pandemic. This commitment to scale up Housing First is urgently needed, particularly in light of the number of people who have been supported into emergency accommodation in all parts of the country in the last 18 months, and the welcome Conservative manifesto ambition to "end the blight of rough sleeping by the end of the next Parliament by expanding successful pilots and programmes such as...Housing First."¹

During this inquiry, we've heard from world-leading authorities on Housing First and senior politicians leading the government-funded pilots in the city-regions in England. They've told us that the cost of not scaling up Housing First services across England is vast - both to the individuals themselves and to the taxpayer. They also told us how Housing First has become a central response to ending

¹ The Conservative Party (2019) *The Conservative and Unionist Party Manifesto 2019* https://assets-global.website-files.com/5da42e2cae7ebd3f8bde353c/5dda924905da587992a064ba_Conervative%202019%20Manifesto.pdf

homelessness in practice across the world, including in Finland, the United States, and closer to home in Scotland and Wales, but not yet in England.

Crucial to the successful scaling up of Housing First in other countries was clear political support for the programme and strong cross-party consensus on the vital role Housing First has to play in ending homelessness. We therefore call upon our colleagues across both Houses to join us in making the case for a national Housing First programme, with a clear commitment to the continuation of the pilots and expansion of provision in the Spending Review as the first step. This report clearly sets out how, with extensive and careful planning, scaling up Housing First in England can play a significant role in ending the homelessness of people with multiple and serious needs.

As Co-Chairs, we welcome the report's findings and very much look forward to acting upon the recommendations. We would like to pay tribute to the individuals and organisations who have attended our inquiry evidence sessions and taken the time to submit evidence to our consultations. We would particularly like to say thank you to the 65 people with direct experience of homelessness and Housing First who shared their powerful testimonies with us. The real experts are the people directly affected and we recognise it is not always an easy testimony to provide but is crucial to the policy-makers trying to understand and tackle homelessness.

We now look forward to working with our Vice-Chairs, Officers, and all members of the APPG for Ending Homelessness, using our collective voice to make a compelling case to the Government that the national roll out of Housing First is essential if we are to end the plight of homelessness of the most vulnerable people in our society. We urge the Government to take forward the recommendations in this report with immediate effect, and we ask Members of both Houses from across the political spectrum to support the Government in doing so. Working together to end homelessness in this country, once and for all, ought to be our utmost priority.



Bob Blackman MP



Neil Coyle MP

Executive Summary

Over the past year, the pandemic has made demonstrably clear the importance of a safe and secure home for an individual's health, wellbeing and dignity. Through Government's Everyone In initiative and subsequent efforts, 37,000 people facing homelessness were provided with an emergency place to stay to protect them from the risks of the virus. This rapid access to safe accommodation saved lives and prevented additional pressure on the NHS at a critical time - a study by the Lancet showed that because of this response 266 deaths were avoided during the first wave of the pandemic among England's homeless population, as well as 21,092 infections, 1,164 hospital admissions and 338 admissions to Intensive Care Units.² For many people this initiative was the first time in a long time, or ever, that they had engaged constructively with local homelessness services.

These unprecedented efforts from local authorities, charities and support organisations, alongside national policy change to support people to cover the cost of rents and keep their homes, altered the homelessness landscape in England and demonstrated how real progress towards ending homelessness can be made when there is sufficient political will and bold policy action. Importantly, it showed the value of a housing-led response to homelessness - where people are provided with quick access to safe accommodation before support services look to address any other issues these individuals may need support with.

Looking ahead, in order to end rough sleeping for good, the Government must not

only continue to support people to come off the streets, but must direct their attention towards ensuring people acquire access to a safe home, and receive the necessary support they need to never return to a life on the streets. Crucially, a considerable proportion of the people supported into safe accommodation across the country during Everyone In, and others who have become newly homeless since the pandemic began, will require a Housing First offer if they are to permanently end their homelessness.

Housing First is an internationally recognised method of ending homelessness for people with interlocking, multiple and serious support needs. It provides someone with rapid access to stable housing, from where their personal needs can be addressed through coordinated and intensive support on an open-ended basis.³ These needs can include entrenched street homelessness, mental, psychological or emotional ill-health, drug and/or alcohol dependency, contact with the criminal justice system, experience of trauma, physical ill-health, or experience of domestic violence and abuse.

Housing First provides its clients with the necessary intensive and personalised support that is often missing from many traditional

266 deaths were avoided during the first wave of the pandemic among England's homeless population.

² The Lancet (2020) – Covid-19 among people experiencing homelessness in England: a modelling study – [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanres/article/PIIS2213-2600\(20\)30396-9/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanres/article/PIIS2213-2600(20)30396-9/fulltext)

³ Littlewood, M, Bramley, G, Fitzpatrick, S & Wood, J. (2017), Eradicating 'Core Homelessness' in Scotland's Four Largest Cities: Providing an Evidence Base and Guiding a Funding Framework: A Report to Social Bite. Edinburgh: Social Bite

2,000 Housing First places currently available in England.

homelessness support services. This support is provided over a prolonged period and is unconditional. The APPG heard from 65 individuals with experience of homelessness about Housing First with testimony on what worked well or could be improved, and what distinguished this programme from other homelessness services they had previously used. They also provided an account of what the service has enabled them to do with their life. The evidence from this was resoundingly clear – for people that have the highest and most serious support needs compounding their homelessness, Housing First works.

Current provision of Housing First across England stands at 2,000 places – far below the scale of what is needed to make a true impact on ending homelessness, and ensure the Government meets their welcome manifesto commitment to end rough sleeping by the end of this Parliament. Research commissioned by Crisis and Homeless Link prior to the pandemic estimated that at least 16,450 people could benefit from Housing First. It is likely that the need for these services across the country will have increased since this study given the number of people supported throughout the pandemic, and rising levels of

homelessness since the research was carried out.⁴ Without expanding the provision of Housing First to this scale, these individuals face a cycle of homelessness, trauma and ill-health. Housing First is shown to break this cycle and provide individuals with a chance to build a life away from homelessness.

Of these 2,000 Housing First places currently available in England, a large proportion are found in the three city-region Housing First pilots in Greater Manchester, Liverpool City Region and the West Midlands Combined Authority, which received funding from the Government in 2017. This funding is due to end from 2022 onwards, and as it stands there is no clarity about how the 1,100 Housing First places across these pilots will be financed past this point. This has generated a huge amount of apprehension and uncertainty for both providers and the people supported out of homelessness by these services. This is despite the evidence emerging from the pilots on the clear impact the services are having on individuals and on reducing numbers of people rough sleeping in these areas.

This APPG report calls on the Government to use the opportunity of the upcoming Spending Review this autumn to demonstrate its commitment to ending rough sleeping and deliver the necessary funding to secure the future of these three Housing First city-region pilots. The APPG also urges the Government to commit to the national roll out of Housing First and as a first step, fund the expansion of Housing First provision to other regions in England where there are high numbers of people with multiple, high intensity support needs who are homeless. This will include people who may still be sleeping rough, or people who have been supported into emergency and move-on accommodation throughout the pandemic.

Sustaining the existing pilots, and committing to scaling up Housing First, so that every person who needs the programme to end their homelessness can access a place, is the natural next step for Government if it is to build momentum on the progress it has so far made. The proposal to roll out Housing First across the country would be a bold measure to take, but it will produce profound results that meaningfully deliver on Government's manifesto commitment to end rough sleeping, not only by the end of this Parliament, but for consecutive years to come.

This report also puts forward suggested solutions with regards to the practicalities of scaling up Housing First provision. Central to this are the testimonies of people with lived experience who informed this report, and the frontline experiences of organisations currently delivering Housing First services. The solutions include ways to ensure Housing First is delivered with cross-departmental coordination at a national level; delivering services tailored for women as a group who would benefit significantly from Housing First; and critically, securing a sufficient supply of adequate housing stock for Housing First. Testimony was clear that any efforts to scale up services must be underpinned by a commitment by the Government to deliver additional social housing.

⁴ Francesca Albanese, Crisis (2020) *Homelessness projections in England could drop by a quarter in the next decade with targeted Government action* - <https://www.crisis.org.uk/about-us/the-crisis-blog/homelessness-projections-in-england-could-drop-by-a-quarter-in-the-next-decade-with-targeted-government-action/>

Note on the inquiry

The APPG for Ending Homelessness passionately believes that to establish systems and services that work to successfully end homelessness, the experiences of people facing homelessness must be at the heart of its design. In producing this report, the APPG has placed the testimony of those with direct experience of homelessness at the forefront of its analysis. We heard from people with lived experience of Housing First services at four inquiry evidence sessions, and ran a written consultation process inviting individuals with significant and prolonged experience of homelessness who have used Housing First services to share their experiences. In addition to this, the APPG held an online focus group with a small group of people who have used Housing First services in Greater Manchester to share their views on Housing First and then more specifically on the initial findings of the report so far.

In total the APPG heard from 65 individuals with lived experience of homelessness that have used the Housing First programme, providing a comprehensive evidence base for this report. The APPG will publish a separate document later this year to set out clearly the powerful and inspiring testimony of these individuals. This document 'Voices of Housing First' will outline how and why Housing First works for people with multiple or serious needs that compound their homelessness, focusing on:

- The importance of having a safe home
- The intensive personalised support that a Housing First programme entails
- The choice and control given to clients
- How it allowed clients to think optimistically about their future

The APPG also received over 30 individual case studies in another written consultation from organisations who are on the frontline of delivering Housing First.

At the four inquiry evidence sessions the APPG members heard from world-leading authorities on Housing First, including the founder of the model Dr Sam Tsemberis, Juha Kaakinen; the CEO of the world-renowned Y Foundation in Finland, and Samara Jones from Housing First Europe Hub. We heard from senior politicians leading the Housing First pilots across England - Andy Street; Mayor of West Midlands Combined Authority, Andy Burnham; Mayor of Greater Manchester and Steve Rotheram; Mayor of the Liverpool City Region, as well as several providers of Housing First across Great Britain. In total of over 25 organisations and 65 individuals submitted either oral or written evidence. We would like to thank all these individuals and organisations for their time and testimonies for the inquiry.

Research commissioned by Crisis and Homeless Link prior to the pandemic estimated that at least 16,450 people could benefit from Housing First.

1. Policy context: Why an inquiry into scaling up Housing First?

The Government's response to rough sleeping in the pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated the clear importance of having a safe and secure home for a person's health, wellbeing, and dignity. People who are homeless, particularly those rough sleeping, are most exposed to the risks of the virus. As well as being unable to self-isolate or 'lockdown,' they are three times more likely to suffer from a chronic health condition, including respiratory conditions, which make the dangers of the virus so much more acute.⁵

Since the start of the pandemic, we have seen a step-change in the approach to homelessness by the Government in Westminster. Homelessness has been tackled as a public health issue, most notably for people sleeping rough. Doing so led to the Government's Everyone In initiative where local authorities in England were instructed to prioritise the safety of people sleeping rough or at risk of sleeping rough by offering them rapid access to a safe place to stay. This meant offering people individual rooms with self contained facilities so they could self-isolate.⁶ These efforts from local authorities to support people have continued over the past 18 months, and a reported 37,000 people have been temporarily housed or supported

into longer-term accommodation, protecting them from the dangers of the virus.⁷ This extraordinary effort by national government, local authorities, the homelessness sector and frontline services undoubtedly saved lives, and avoided additional pressure on the NHS at a critical time. A study by the Lancet showed that because of this response 266 deaths were avoided during the first wave of the pandemic among England's homeless population, as well as 21,092 infections, 1,164 hospital admissions and 338 admissions to Intensive Care Units.⁸

The Everyone In initiative also showed that by providing people with a safe place to stay, real progress on ending rough sleeping can be made. As well as offering people living on the streets with a space of their own to safely isolate during lockdown, it often also facilitated their engagement with homelessness support and move-on services. At the time of publication 26,000 of the 37,000 people supported in the last 18 months have received settled accommodation or support to move-on from the temporary housing provided to them.⁹

The effort to provide move-on accommodation has also been enabled by both the Government's Rough Sleeping Accommodation Programme (RSAP), also

⁵ Lewer D, et al (2019) *Health-related quality of life and prevalence of six chronic diseases in homeless and housed people: a cross-sectional study in London and Birmingham*, England, BMJ Open.

⁶ Letter from Luke Hall MP, Minister for Local Government and Homelessness – 26 March 2020 https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/928780/Letter_from_Minister_Hall_to_Local_Authorities.pdf

⁷ Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government press release – 25 February 2021 <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/huge-progress-made-as-rough-sleeping-figures-at-6-year-low>

⁸ The Lancet (2020) – *Covid-19 among people experiencing homelessness in England: a modelling study* – [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanres/article/PIIS2213-2600\(20\)30396-9/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanres/article/PIIS2213-2600(20)30396-9/fulltext)

⁹ Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government press release – 25 February 2021 <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/huge-progress-made-as-rough-sleeping-figures-at-6-year-low>

known as the Next Steps programme, and funding through the Rough Sleeping Initiative (RSI). The RSI was first launched in 2018 and provides funding to councils for the delivery of local homelessness services, charities and organisations aimed at tackling rough sleeping.¹⁰

The RSAP committed to providing 6,000 places for longer-term accommodation for people sleeping rough or at risk of sleeping rough over the course of this Parliament. This has given local authorities the opportunity to use this funding to secure tenancies for a maximum of two years, providing an immediate route out of emergency accommodation for some. While this is welcome, the guidance for RSAP is clear that tenancies should be for a maximum of two years to enable a continuing flow of accommodation and support for those who need it. This means it is focused on short-term provision as opposed to longer-term secure homes and support for people who experiencing rough sleeping. Consequently, in reality, these homes provided through RSAP will provide a permanent national resource for responding to the immediate needs of rough sleeping, rather than providing longer-term homes and ongoing support that will effectively end people's homelessness.

Funding for emergency and move-on accommodation for people sleeping rough

The Government has provided several funding arrangements for the RSAP:

- **May 2020 - £161million** was allocated from a larger £433million funding announcement to deliver 3,300 units of 'longer-term, move-on accommodation'. This amount is divided between £130million funding for housing and £31million funding for support services.
- **June 2020 - £105million** to boost funding already allocated to the emergency response to the pandemic. This can be used to help people access tenancies in the private rented sector, or to secure or extend any interim accommodation, for example, hotels or student accommodation, and support people to reconnect with friends or family.

Funding for the RSI:¹¹

- **May 2021 - £203million** for the fourth year of the RSI with this funding allocated to councils across England to support projects such as shelters, specialist addiction or mental health services and outreach. This follows the £112million provided for 2020/2021.

What is needed to build on this response to end rough sleeping

Through the Everyone In initiative, subsequent efforts from local authorities and homeless organisations, and the RSAP, the landscape of homelessness and rough sleeping in England has been altered and has offered some people

a real chance at a life away from living on the streets. However, people with higher or multiple support needs who are currently in emergency or move-on accommodation face a likely return to homelessness and rough sleeping in the long term, unless they can get access to permanent housing with the necessary intensive support they need to sustain their home and therefore bring an end to their homelessness for good.

During the inquiry, the APPG heard from several organisations who had supported people who had faced homelessness during the pandemic to this effect. One organisation stated that their analysis had found that 25% of all of their residents they had supported in Everyone In hotels were deemed to have high level, multiple support needs. Another organisation stated that some of their clients who had previously been suspicious of homelessness support services before the pandemic and who had been reluctant to engage with staff, did not want to return to rough sleeping when restrictions lifted. Clearly the pandemic provided an opportunity for local services to engage with people who have higher needs, or those who may have been seen as "serial disengagers" from homelessness services.¹²

There is no national breakdown of people with multiple support needs who are currently in emergency accommodation or sleeping rough. Some evidence suggests a significant minority of people who have been supported through the homelessness system in the last 18 months will have multiple support needs. A survey of over 500 rough sleepers the year before the pandemic found that the vast majority of respondents reported having at least one physical health need (83%) and reported a mental health vulnerability (82%).¹³ Sixty per cent of respondents had a support need

Since the pandemic started, a quarter (25%) of people approaching local authorities for homelessness assistance had a history of mental health problems, 14% had drug dependency needs and 7% had alcohol dependency needs.

related to drug or alcohol misuse and many people had overlapping needs. Data on people approaching local authorities for homelessness assistance since the pandemic started shows that a quarter (25%) had a history of mental health problems, 14% had drug dependency needs and seven per cent had alcohol dependency needs. For these people with multiple and serious needs, the evidence shows that the existing homelessness system can be inadequate and provide insufficient support to enable their recovery and transition to a life away from rough sleeping.

Typically, people experiencing homelessness are expected to move through different steps of accommodation, including hostels and other forms of temporary and supported accommodation, to be able to demonstrate their 'tenancy readiness' before being able to get access to mainstream housing. This means that housing becomes available when people comply with certain requirements and agree to accept any suggested treatment. This too is a presumption under the RSAP, that people will first 'recover' from rough sleeping in the accommodation provided, before accessing alternative housing.¹⁴

10 Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government press release – 28 January 2020 <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/boost-to-successful-government-rough-sleeping-programme>

11 Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government press release – 15 May 2021 <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/councils-given-further-200-million-in-next-stage-of-successful-rough-sleeping-programme>

12 Johnsen, S. (2013), *Turning Point Scotland's Housing First Project Evaluation: Final Report*, Edinburgh, Institute for Housing, Urban and Real Estate Research, Heriot-Watt University.

13 MHCLG (2021) *Understanding the Multiple Vulnerabilities, Support Needs, and Experiences of People who Sleep Rough in England*. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/944598/Initial_findings_from_the_rough_sleeping_questionnaire_access.pdf

14 Centre for Social Justice (2021) *Close to Home* <https://www.centreforsocialjustice.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/CSJ-Close-to-Home-2021.pdf>

Yet for some people, especially those with the most serious needs, this type of homelessness support is often completely unsuitable, leaving them to fall through the gaps of services through being evicted from accommodation, getting stuck within the hostel and supported accommodation system, or rejecting services altogether and returning to rough sleeping. Difficulties for these individuals navigating this system can originate from living in an environment with people who have similar substance addictions, or the instability that derives from hostels' short-term placements, combined with stressful experiences of exclusion, bureaucracy, rules and complexity. People can also suffer if there is limited mental health, substance misuse and psychological support available.¹⁵

During the APPG inquiry, several people with lived experience of homelessness services, described how they had failed to receive adequate support. The testimonies of these Housing First tenants made clear the risk of people remaining homeless or returning to rough sleeping when using the current offer of homelessness services:

People with multiple support needs who are currently in emergency accommodation face a likely return to homelessness, unless they can get access to permanent housing with the necessary intensive support they need.

"I didn't find any of the support available any good at all, the support was to be placed in a hostel which was full of drugs, out of area and no hope of moving on from so I left after a few days and returned to my tent where I could have my own space."

"Everywhere I went, every place I got housed in these hostels, my using would get worse because of the environment for me, it was just playing on my anxiety and so I just ended up just not going to these places and living on the streets."

"It felt like I was always going round and round in circles from one place to the next, nothing was settled or permanent or stable, which made things worse... I always just wanted to settle and have somewhere safe, with support that I could trust, and that people would understand why I behaved the way I had."

These experiences highlight the urgent need for a different offer for people with multiple and serious needs to end rough sleeping in England. What was clear from the testimonies and evidence received by the APPG, was that in place of a 'staircase' system which tests 'tenancy readiness' and, where people with the multiple and associated needs could not engage, Housing First was what was needed to permanently end their homelessness.

The Government now faces a unique opportunity in the aftermath of the pandemic to ensure the right support is in place to end the homelessness of everyone who has been supported into safe accommodation by providing Housing First for people with the most serious support needs.

2. The case for scaling up Housing First

What is Housing First?

Housing First is an internationally recognised method of ending homelessness for people with interlocking, multiple and serious needs who experience homelessness. In place of a system prioritising proof of 'tenancy readiness', Housing First provides rapid access to stable ordinary (private or social) rented housing. From this point, other support needs clients have are addressed through coordinated and intensive support on an open-ended basis.¹⁶ These needs can include entrenched street homelessness, mental, psychological or emotional ill-health, drug and/or alcohol dependency, contact with the criminal justice system, experience of trauma, physical ill-health, or experience of domestic violence and abuse.

The APPG for Ending Homelessness heard from one organisation which delivers Housing First services. Out of their 171 clients: 144 have mental health issues, 148 experience drug misuse, 82 experience alcohol misuse, 140 have dual diagnosis, 112 have a history of offending, 103 have physical health issues and 67 have disabilities.

Principles of Housing First

1. People have a right to a home.

Housing First prioritises access to housing as quickly as possible. Eligibility for housing is not contingent on any conditions, other than willingness to maintain a tenancy. The individual will not lose their house if they disengage or no longer require support. The individual will be given their own tenancy agreement.

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

This principle probably distinguishes Housing First clearly from other forms of homelessness support. Providers of Housing First commit to long-term offers of support which do not have a fixed end date; recovery takes time and varies by individual needs, characteristics and experiences.

3. Housing and support are separated.

It is essential that tenancies are not conditional on someone's willingness to accept support for other problems. This allows people to maintain their tenancy, even if they do not engage with support. Furthermore, the support continues even if the person goes to prison, returns to the streets or is admitted to hospital.

4. Individuals have choice and control.

People should be given choice about where to live, the services on offer to them and whether or not they wish to use them. Individuals should be supported through person-centred planning and given the lead to shape the support they receive. Evidence has shown giving more choice to people with higher, more interlocking support needs, leads to better outcomes.

5. An active engagement approach.

Staff are responsible for proactively engaging with their clients and ensuring the service fits the individual instead of trying to make the individual fit the service. Caseloads are small allowing staff to be persistent and proactive in their approach, doing 'whatever it takes' and not giving up or closing the case when engagement is low. Overall, support is provided for as long as each client requires it, even if they lose their home or leave their home temporarily.

6. Based on people's strengths, goals and aspirations.

Housing First services are underpinned by a belief that there is always a possibility for positive change and improved health and wellbeing, relationships and community and/or economic integration. Individuals are supported to develop increased self-esteem, self-worth and confidence.

7. A harm minimisation approach.

Housing First respects an individual's current wishes and behaviour. Staff support people who use substances to reduce immediate and ongoing harm to their health. This involves encouraging them to use drug and alcohol treatment services where appropriate, but does not require them to do so as a condition of their tenancy.

Importantly, there are no conditions of 'tenancy readiness' put upon people they can access a home through Housing First. Instead, secure housing is viewed as the platform from which their other issues can be addressed.

To be successful, services must adhere to the **principles of Housing First**.¹⁷ These principles for England, published by Homeless Link in November 2016, are based on the evidence initially gathered by Pathways to Housing in the USA, and are aligned with the core principles in the FEANTSA Housing First Guide Europe.

How much Housing First is needed in England?

England remains behind many other countries in its commitment, scale and provision of Housing First services, including within the nations of Great Britain. This is even more notable given the country's leadership in many areas of homelessness best practice, for example trauma-informed care and the response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

According to Housing First England, there are a total of around 2,000 Housing First places available in England, provided by around 90 organisations or services.¹⁸ Typically, these services are delivered on a small scale across one local authority area, and have been operating for a relatively short time period - just over a fifth (22%) have been delivering services for less than a year, under a third (32%) for between one and two years, and 45% for two years or more. The greatest number of places in England are based in the North West, London and the West

Midlands. The three city-region pilots have contributed to a significant and welcome growth in numbers since 2017, and between them will provide over 1,100 places once fully rolled out. In London, there has also been an increase in places over the last three years, with just 84 places in 2017 growing to 325 by 2020.

While the recent growth in the number of Housing First places is welcome, it remains far below the scale of the demand, making it difficult to have a meaningful impact on reducing rough sleeping and homelessness in England. Evidence prior to the pandemic commissioned by Crisis and Homeless Link found that 16,450 Housing First places were needed across England.¹⁹ It is likely that demand for these services will have increased since this study given the number of people supported throughout the pandemic, and rising levels of homelessness since the research was carried out.²⁰ This would mean that current provision falls far short of the demand for Housing First. Figure 1 shows the regional distribution of need based on the Crisis and Homeless Link research compared with the current availability.

The Westminster Government has demonstrated a welcome understanding of the integral role Housing First can play in ending homelessness, by investing £28 million in the provision of three Housing First pilots in the city-regions of Greater Manchester, West Midlands Combined Authority and Liverpool City Region in 2017, and the RSI, which has boosted the resources available to provide Housing First at a local level.

Notably, the three city-region pilots have contributed to the growth in Housing First

17 Homeless Link (2017) *Housing First in England: the principles* <https://hfe.homeless.org.uk/sites/default/files/attachments/The%20Principles%20for%20Housing%20First.pdf>

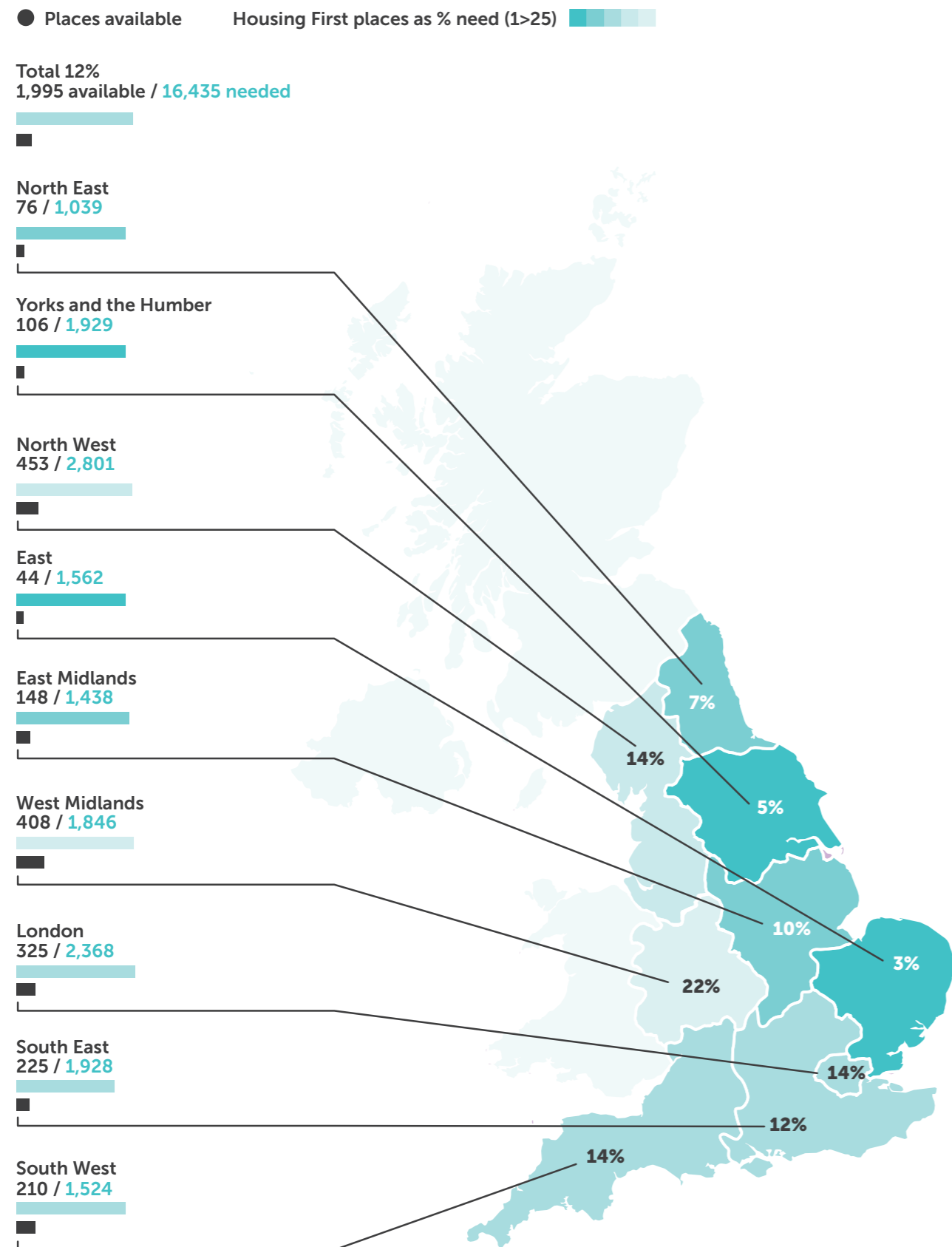
18 Homeless Link (2020) *The Picture of Housing First in England*. London: Homeless Link.

19 Blood, I., Goldup, M., Peter, L. and Dulson, S. (2018) *Implementing Housing First across England, Scotland and Wales*. Imogen Blood & Associates. London, Crisis and Homeless Link

20 Francesca Albanese, Crisis (2020) *Homelessness projections in England could drop by a quarter in the next decade with targeted Government action* - <https://www.crisis.org.uk/about-us/the-crisis-blog/homelessness-projections-in-england-could-drop-by-a-quarter-in-the-next-decade-with-targeted-government-action/>

Scale of Housing First in England now

Figure 1. Regional distribution of need and places for Housing First



From: Centre for Social Justice (2021) *Close to Home - The case for rolling out Housing First in England*. London: Centre for Social Justice.

places since 2017. While each launched their services at different points, they are already delivering life-changing services to hundreds of people with the most serious needs. For example, in the West Midlands Combined Authority Housing First pilot, 84% (341) of the clients have mental health needs, 26% (105) are clients with a physical disability and 94% (380) of those supported on the programme have identified themselves as having substance misuse or alcohol dependency.

The evidence that has emerged so far from the three pilots at this stage is positive and encouraging: by September 2020 the pilots had housed 450 people, with 88% of clients sustaining tenancies across the programme. Most recently, up to May 2021, the West Midlands pilot recorded a sustainment rate of 93% and the Liverpool City region pilot recorded 90.4% sustainment in the quarter up to April 2021. Each Mayor has spoken publicly on the success of the programme and reiterated their support for Housing First during the APPG's inquiry:

"The pilot is working, it is a breakthrough, and we as a country need to get behind it and roll it out."
Andy Street

"The pilot is an emerging success story."
Andy Burnham

"I'm convinced that Housing First is the right to go to permanently tackle rough sleeping."
Steve Rotheram

Despite this clear political commitment to Housing First at a regional level, the future of the pilots is very much unclear. In the 2017 Autumn Budget the Government invested £28million in these pilots, with funding due to end from 2022 onwards. **To date there is no clarity about how the 1,100 Housing First places across these pilots will be financed past this point.**

All three Mayors expressed concern around this lack of certainty and clarity on the future of the pilots in the APPG inquiry sessions. Andy Street said – "In terms of lessons going forward, the whole question is of certainty – is the funding for this going to be sustained." Andy Burnham spoke too of the importance of clarifying the future of the pilots and recommended that they were made permanent. Steve Rotheram said they were stuck in the "process of having to convince the Government" of the value of the pilot.

As it stands the three city-region Housing First pilots face a cliff edge of funding, and that means tenants are facing a cliff edge of support. This is causing a huge amount of uncertainty for everyone involved in the pilots, and most importantly of all, for people living in the current Housing First provision. Given the manifesto ambition to end rough sleeping in England by the end of this Parliament is fast approaching, a commitment to Housing First must come imminently, with the Spending Review this autumn providing a timely and ideal opportunity to do so. A priority for this will be securing further funding for the pilots to continue their excellent work supporting clients in Housing First services, and considering expanding this funding to areas where Housing First is in high demand.

What impact would scaling-up Housing First have on the Government's commitment to end rough sleeping?

People with lived experience of both traditional homelessness services and Housing First told us:

"I had been through such a long ordeal trying to get the help I needed. Other services kept telling me I didn't meet their criteria, it was such a relief to get on Housing First. I'd spent years in a lot

of very unsafe places: rough sleeping, night shelters and sofa-surfing. I stopped washing at one point because I found out that when I smelled of body odour people were less likely to try and force themselves on me.”

“And I don’t think I could get clean without having Housing First and having the space of a house of my own. Not being surrounded by other addicts in their addiction which set me off.”

“Everything worked well with Housing First. Housing First gave me the right support and gave help when needed.”

“I have a place that I am over the moon with. I could not have done it without help from Housing First. I feel safe and secure. I am hoping to spend many years here. I plan to keep this place as my forever home. I am a keen gardener and I will be growing my own veg soon... I am happy I have this flat after being homeless for so many years; it’s like a dream come true.”

The evidence base for Housing First is exceptionally strong.²¹ Housing First is best known for its excellent tenancy sustainment and housing retention outcomes. Existing evidence shows that Housing First sustainably ends the homelessness of around 80% of its clients who have high, interlocking support needs and is consequently considered one of the most important innovations in the homelessness sector of the last few decades.²²

The success of Housing First was also evident from the APPG’s inquiry. Similarly, Dr Sam Tsemberis said that Housing First was the solution to ending homelessness, and that there was nothing magical or undoable about its success in other countries. Samara Jones

£9,683 is spent annually on a Housing First client, £15,073 is saved on other bills including homelessness services, the NHS, mental health services, and drug and alcohol support.

from Housing First Europe Hub went further to say that England is in the position to be an international leader with regards to Housing First, particularly given the opportunity the pandemic had provided to services, enabling them to engage with people needing support.

A range of organisations providing Housing First services across the UK, varying both in location and in scale of provision, submitted evidence to the APPG. This included Two Saints, an organisation that delivers services on the south coast, Changing Lives from the north-east, Jigsaw Support who are based in Greater Manchester, Golden Key Housing First in Bristol and St. Mungo’s who run 11 Housing First services in the south of England and London to at least 166 clients.

Evidence submitted to the inquiry by these organisations made clear the positive impact Housing First can have on its clients, and the successful outcomes they had recorded with regards to tenancy sustainment. This includes:

- In Scotland, the three-year **Pathfinder programme** was launched in April 2019, delivering Housing First in five cities

in Scotland, and in a rural context in Aberdeenshire. Maggie Brünjes, Chief Executive of Homeless Network Scotland told the APPG about the 300+ tenancies provided in this programme, which has since increased to nearly 500. As of March 2021, 86% of people were still in their provided homes, and there have been no evictions to date.²³

- Since December 2018, **Maidstone Housing** has supported 10 people who have multiple needs and have experienced repeated rough sleeping. At the time of submitting evidence to the APPG’s inquiry, all 10 clients have successfully maintained their tenancy and have not returned to rough sleeping.
- The Housing First service in **Rotherham** has supported a total of 41 clients since 2018, with 34 either sustaining a tenancy or having moved in a planned positive way. This equates to a total of 83% positive sustainment of tenancies.
- From **Standing Together’s** preliminary data from the one year evaluation of their Housing First project they deliver with Solace Women’s Aid they found 88% of women housed had maintained their tenancies. This includes the first two women who were housed in November 2019 who have now been able to maintain their tenancies for over a year.

In their testimony organisations noted how these impressive outcomes could help to reduce the numbers of people sleeping rough in a given area, particularly alongside other homelessness interventions, and help the Government meet their manifesto commitment to end rough sleeping by the end of this Parliament. For example:

- In **Greater Manchester** Housing First has contributed to the reduction in the number

of rough sleepers in the region – from 241 in 2018 to 151 in 2019, a drop of 37%.

- In the **West Midlands Combined Authority** area, of the 289 who were under a Housing First tenancy, 193 have a history of direct rough sleeping on the streets, 83 a history of rough sleeping via hostels/sofa surfing and 13 were at risk of rough sleeping. The rough sleeping count is 121 for the same geographic area.
- In Westminster, **Solace Women’s Aid and Standing Together’s** Housing First scheme supported 11 women in its first year, out of an estimated 47 street homeless women in Westminster in 2019, and Solace Women’s Aid’s Islington scheme supports five women out of an estimated nine street homeless women in Islington.

As well as ending homelessness, the evidence submitted to the APPG also highlighted the impact of Housing First on other aspects of clients’ lives across health, justice, and social relationships and community integration. For example, through Housing First, and the incredible advocacy of support workers, clients can be supported to get prompt and coordinated access to essential health services. Many clients can address their health issues and needs through primary and community care, rather than through the use of higher cost emergency services. Clients may also access detox services to deal with any substance misuse. One Housing First outreach worker said “*Having a house is big, prior to being in their properties a lot weren’t on script or having mental health services...giving them that stability helps allow this. Particularly getting bank account and GP...100% have registered with a GP.*”

The unconditional support given by Housing First staff can help clients to engage with a range of appropriate health services, and

21 Mackie, P., Johnsen, S., and Wood, J. (2017), *Ending rough sleeping: what works? An international evidence review*, London: Crisis.

22 Mackie, P., Johnsen, S., and Wood, J. (2017), *Ending rough sleeping: what works? An international evidence review*, London: Crisis.

23 Housing First Scotland (2021) *Housing First tracker* - <https://homelessnetwork.scot/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/HF-Scotland-Monthly-Tracker-MARCH-2021.pdf>

assist them in trying receiving the help and support they need. Many of the organisations that submitted evidence to the APPG's inquiry outlined the impact the service can have on clients' health and wellbeing:

- One Housing First service found that all of their 10 clients experienced an improvement in their physical health, everyone who used drugs and/or alcohol had accessed the support which has led to four people reducing use and three stopping use.
- Another service found that 12 out of the 15 people with substance issues were currently either speaking with a drug counsellor, speaking with the local substance misuse service, or taking methadone prescription. Staff stated how their clients would never have been on methadone prescription if they were not in a stable home.
- Standing Together's evaluation from 2020 found that through Housing First 90% of their clients were supported to register with a GP and three women had started methadone scripting and maintaining it, some for the first time in many months.
- At Golden Key in Bristol, amongst the five Housing First clients who have been known to local services for over a year, there had been a threefold increase in planned access to community mental health support rather than at crisis points, a reduction in general hospital admissions of 50%, 100% reduction in inpatient detoxification days and 90% reduction in A&E presentations.

As well as being advantageous for the individuals using the services, this clearly has the potential to bring substantial cost savings to the taxpayer if Housing First

services were to be scaled up. Through its intensive, personalised provision of support it enables clients to stabilise, recover from traumas and reduce their contact with emergency services, such as visits to A&E. Research from the Centre for Social Justice found that where an estimated £9,683 is spent annual per average on a Housing First client, £15,073 is saved on other bills including homelessness services, the NHS, mental health services, and drug and alcohol support. **This means that for each £1 spent on Housing First there is an overall saving on the cost of service provision of £1.56.**²⁴

Additionally, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation estimated that if Housing First was to be rolled out as the default option for homeless adults with complex needs in the UK it could save £200 million a year after two years of delivery at scale.²⁵ Particularly in light of the financial constraints of the pandemic, these savings are especially significant, and highlight the high cost, both financial and social, of not rolling out Housing First.

Recommendations:

The Government should commit to nationally scaling up Housing First in England and making it the default option of support for people with multiple serious needs that compound their homelessness.

- The evidence base for Housing First ending the homelessness of people with multiple and serious needs is exceptionally strong; far stronger than is true of any other intervention for people who are homeless and have multiple needs.
- The success of Everyone In, the RSAP, and continued efforts from local authorities and local organisations, means many people with multiple and associated needs

are currently in emergency or move-on accommodation. There is a unique opportunity for the Government to ensure they can access Housing First, so that they are not stuck cycling in and out of homelessness and rough sleeping, or do not return to living on the streets.

- Research commissioned by Crisis and Homeless Link prior to the pandemic estimates that at least 16,450 people could benefit from Housing First to end their cycle of entrenched homelessness and rough sleeping while the current scale of provision is at around 2,000 spaces in England.

The Government should use the opportunity of the upcoming Spending Review in autumn to secure further funding for the three city-region pilots and commit to expanding it to other regions with the highest need.

- With the upcoming Spending Review in autumn, the Government has an opportunity to make clear that Housing First is a priority to deliver an end to rough sleeping in England by 2024. The APPG strongly recommends that the Government uses this opportunity to invest further in the Housing First pilots.
- This must include funding to deliver the support needed to meet the needs of clients. It is crucial that this funding is long-term rather than temporary or ad-hoc to ensure people's homelessness is ended for good.

- The Government should also commit to the long-term funding needed to expand Housing First provision to other regions in England with high numbers of people with multiple and serious needs who are homeless, including people who may still remain sleeping rough, or people who have been supported into emergency and move-on accommodation throughout the pandemic.

²⁴ Centre for Social Justice (2021) *Close to Home* <https://www.centreforsocialjustice.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/CSJ-Close-to-Home-2021.pdf>

²⁵ Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2016) *UK Poverty: Causes, Costs and Solutions*, York, Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

3. What people with lived experience of Housing First say about the programme

"Housing First staff have continued to support me through all this, they never went away, they have been a constant, being on my own for the first time wasn't easy especially through this but little by little I am getting stronger, I just feel the extra time they have, the effort and understanding they put into my support makes such a difference."

Over the course of the inquiry the APPG for Ending Homelessness heard from 65 individuals with experience of using Housing First services, through consultations, evidence sessions and online focus groups. There was a strong consensus among individuals as to why Housing First worked so well in ending their homelessness, providing a comprehensive evidence base that will be essential to guiding Government when scaling up Housing First services in England.

The APPG will also publish a separate document later this year, to set out clearly the powerful and inspiring testimony of these individuals. This document 'Voices of Housing First' will outline how Housing First works for people with multiple or serious needs that compound their homelessness.

The importance of the relationship between a Housing First client and caseworker, and the provision of intensive, tailored support

"I feel Housing First is different as I felt as though there was more commitment and the support was more intensive than other support I have received over the years. I also felt that I trusted my Housing First support worker as everything that was told to me about Housing First service was delivered."

Housing First is designed to deliver person-centred, intensive, flexible support to clients. It is intended to be provided to clients on an on going or unconditional basis, with persistence and reliability of the caseworker central to the building of trust with their client. Initially, support will typically be very intensive, heavily engaging with an individual while they consider the offer of a Housing First tenancy, and both before and immediately after they move into their new home. The intensity of support is likely to then gradually decrease as their lives stabilise and recovery continues.

However, this trajectory is not definite – support is provided flexibly for as long as it is needed, on the recognition that people in the Housing First services will have experienced multiple, repeated trauma which will need long-term continuous support to recover from.

The importance of this intensive, continuous support was clear in individual testimony submitted to the APPG, for example:

"Budgeting, paying bills, all the day-to-day issues but also there was always really good emotional support. Over time I felt I could trust and be honest, the amount of time I had of their support meant I could build up this trust. It was ok to get things done as time was not as limited as it had been before with others."

This principle of open-ended and tailored support is the aspect that distinguishes Housing First most clearly from other forms of support in other homelessness services.

Support is intensive - caseworkers do not simply signpost clients to support services but "handhold" them, accompanying them, advocating for them and ensuring their attendance. This is highly valued by clients, as one demonstrates in the following:

"What I really like about Housing First is that when they say they are going to do something, they do it. They want me to better myself and they have got my back 110%...I would like to teach people decorating, or art and photography. Eventually, I would love to get clean and work for Wirral Ways or Housing First."

Individuals who spoke to the APPG were clear that building and establishing a trusting and non-judgemental relationship between them and their worker was pivotal to their progress on the programme and ending their homelessness:

"My worker is 100% genuine. I normally take a lot of time deciding whether I can trust someone and feel OK opening up to them. I've found a lot of other services hard work to be honest with you. I've felt they've not done anything which is important to me...So I've always ended up giving in in the past, and going back to using."

"What I like about this service is they [caseworkers] understand that you're just angry...they know it's not aimed at them...they talk you through it...you know you've always got that person to rely on no matter what you say... It gives you more of a friendship than a worker... that person that you can just let off onto and they don't judge you, it's just the best help ever."

"My Housing First worker is a constant in my life, with her supporting me and a place to stay I can take action on my substance abuse and mental health issues. Housing First have worked with me whatever state I've been in, including when I've been suicidal and unable to see how I could carry on."

The support provided to clients through Housing First is tailored, and differs hugely by each person's needs. It could include practical support, such as:

Budgeting:

"I'm seeing my worker on Thursday because at the moment I want to make sure that I'm budgeting right and that the bills are being paid. The support's massive for where I am...I just want to make sure everything's paid right, so she's coming round, she's making sure that I'm not overpaying or underpaying and that this is going in the right way and that. And she's helping me with forms, stuff like, practical help like that... So, yeah, so it's just handy to be able to be able to budget, live within my means, know how to shop right."

Setting up benefit claims:

"Within weeks I had my own bank account, a live benefit claim, I also started to engage with the local recovery service which hadn't worked in the past but I felt with the extra support in place from Housing First it may be different this time so I gave it a go...It

didn't take long at all for things to start moving forward when I came on to Housing First."

Setting up bank accounts or direct debits:

"I owe Housing First a lot, they saw something in me and helped me in so many ways. They got me the perfect property, a bank account, a dentist, a doctor; all kinds of things. They phone me every day, their support has been amazing."

What support can look like under Housing First:

- Assessments to ensure clients are supported through outreach and home visits
- Delivering essential household items such as temporary table top cookers, microwaves, kettles, particularly when the delivery of white goods were stopped during the pandemic
- The provision of electronic equipment such as mobiles, TVs and radios to help with communications with support staff, and the clients' ability to stay connected with events, especially during the pandemic
- Budgeting advice
- Setting up bank accounts and direct debits
- Checking household utility bills
- The provision of food parcels and fuel vouchers
- Delivering any prescriptions or medication
- Wellbeing checks
- Attendance at any appointments they may have
- Liaising with Department of Work and Pensions to ensure benefit payments are up and running
- Providing activities or hobbies to tackle boredom or isolation, particularly during lockdown
- Organising and liaising with various service professionals, in particular GPs, hospitals, mental health and physical health teams, occupational therapy teams, district nurses, DWP/Jobcentres, social care teams, probation, the courts, police, domestic violence services and local community assets delivering local services for vulnerable people

Furnishing properties and arranging transport:

"So I really benefitted from this service because of the interaction from my support worker. I felt more at ease due to the fact I had support with literally everything: a settling in grant, new carpets, food parcels, bus passes so I could get to my appointments."

But also emotional support:

"Housing First has kept me off the streets and I have not used heroin since being on script and not begged. The continued support and emotional support is good as I have been able to talk to people openly and not feel judged."

And wellbeing checks:

"I have phone contact every day, even at weekends – welfare checks, I love those welfare checks... because who phones at the weekend to see if you are alright? Nobody. But they do... It made me feel good that somebody is actually worried about me... it's amazing."

Individuals who spoke to the APPG about their own experiences of Housing First repeatedly emphasised the particular importance of intensive support in the first few days, weeks and months of the service, especially around the time of moving into a new property:

"If there wasn't the added support after I moved out of the hostel, I would have crumbled at the first fence. I'm grateful for all the support I continue to receive from Housing First."

"Without this [support] I wouldn't have been able to do it...I didn't need to worry about anything...I went from the streets begging to a flat with no worries feeling settled, they made sure I was ok in every way. Look Housing First means everything to me, they want to help and gave me all the support I need."

Some individuals shared with the APPG that they had not been taught typical life or household management skills when they were growing up, or had not used these skills for many years due to experiencing repeated rough sleeping or homelessness:

"Housing First staff were always there and my support worker helped me with anything and everything, it was the first time for over 10 years I had my own place so I had to learn again."

One caseworker told Housing First provider NOAH Enterprise how moving someone who had little experience of managing a home into a new place was like "expecting people

to swim when they have never experienced life like this before."

Under Housing First intensive support is provided in this crucial period of transition to minimise the often daunting and overwhelming nature of this new environment:

"The support I received in the first few days of moving in was great, my prescription was all set up at a local pharmacy, my gas and electric and all other bills were set up for me."

"I was not prepared and was not sure what to expect but was supported very well in the first few days, which really helped me settle into my new property and made it feel more comfortable."

The skills required of Housing First caseworkers can be quite different and more intensive than other support roles in the sector. Supporting people to sustain their tenancies in this personalised way, while simultaneously helping them navigate several physical or mental health, substance addiction services and rebuild their social networks is highly labour intensive. Staff's emotional and general wellbeing should be a priority for management, and they should actively look to support employees to avoid burn-out and/or compassion fatigue. Critically, staff caseloads should be kept to a maximum of seven clients to ensure that the intensive, flexible support required by Housing First can be delivered.

Recruiting the right people is essential to securing the high level of intensive support necessary for the programme. Not doing so can impact pace of delivery and the quality of services, as Andy Street said during an APPG inquiry evidence session. He noted that recruitment of adequate high quality staff had presented a significant challenge in the pilot, and will require further attention as part of any scaling up of Housing First across England.

The importance of choice

Central to the positive experiences of Housing First clients is how the programme is deliberately designed to give them choice and control in their recovery and rehoming process. This is demonstrated by the following quotes from individuals using Housing First:

“So it’s like I went round a lot in circles it was like, whereas with Housing First because you can engage when you want to engage, there’s not a set real time, you don’t feel forced, you do it in your own time...they explain to you, you know? Take a try at this, go to work, take a step back and go back to work. So it’s all in your own time.”

“There was never you must do this or you must do that to get something, only suggestions and encouragement for things that would benefit me and when I made the decision if I wanted to engage with other service I was supported with this.”

This element of Housing First gives its clients a sense of ownership over their new life away from homelessness, and responsibility to make it work. At one APPG inquiry evidence session we heard from a woman currently using Crisis’ Housing First service in London who spoke about how “amazing” it was to have some independence back in her life, as being in a hostel, all control over her life decisions seemed to be taken out of her hands.

Under Housing First choice extends to giving clients options on where they would like to live. Individual testimonies submitted to the APPG were clear that this was a very positive aspect of the programme, and important to people for various reasons. Some individuals expressed that Housing First represented an opportunity for a fresh start at a new life, away from previous problems or troubles. At an APPG inquiry session we heard from an individual who, after the death of his wife

in 2015, experienced homelessness, and currently is using the Housing First service in the Liverpool City Region pilot. For him, it was crucial to live in Southport, away from connections to his past life. For another client of a different Housing First service, choosing where to live was critical - as a survivor of domestic abuse she wanted to be housed safely away from the perpetrator. Alternatively, some clients wanted to live near existing support networks, for example friends or family:

“I chose a property where I could be near my family. I struggle with a lot of things since my brain injury, I need lots of practical support with organising my life and remembering things and my mum could help with some of that.”

“My mum is my main support network, so it was most important to me to be near her.”

This distinguished Housing First from other forms of other homelessness services they had experienced before:

“Another homelessness service just dumped me somewhere I didn’t know, it was far away from bus and tram stations. I struggle reading and writing so this was distressing. With Laura and Housing First, I felt I had a choice and the chance to ask questions.”

A further way choice is employed effectively through Housing First is by the use of personalised budgets. In some Housing First services clients are provided with a budget, typically ranging between £1,000 to £2,000, to spend as they wish. These funds enable clients to buy furniture or attend activities such as exercise or cooking classes. One client of Housing First used this fund for driving lessons:

“I’m trying to have regular contact with my kids again and if I’m driving it will be easier to go and see them and they will see I’m doing well for myself again.”

These budgets have proved a successful way of encouraging clients to engage with Housing First staff and services, and also helping to maintain that engagement in the longer-term. Speaking to the APPG inquiry evidence session, Andy Street supported this, saying he had seen these funds improve the “stickability” of the scheme to clients and help to sustain their participation in the service.

Also highly valued by Housing First clients was the choice offered by some tenancies to allow them to have a pet. In their submission to the APPG inquiry Dogs Trust outlined how they support Housing First clients through their Hope Project veterinary scheme, which provides free veterinary treatment for dogs whose owners who are homeless or in a homelessness crisis. Their research has found that 95% of pet owners could not imagine giving up their pet for any reason, yet many traditional homelessness services are not pet-friendly - in England less than 10% of hostels accept dogs. Many people will turn down offers of accommodation because they cannot live with their pet. One Housing First client said the following:

“I was homeless on the streets, I had a dog at the time and they said I couldn’t have a dog in property so I chose to leave.”

A Housing First worker said:

“Our Housing First project can only accommodate two individuals at a time who have dogs. I have previously had clients refuse accommodation and chosen to remain street homeless due to us not having the availability to accommodate them with their dog.”

Clearly, the emotional comfort and stability provided by a pet to someone experiencing homelessness should not be overlooked. Housing First, particularly through the longer tenancies often provided alongside the

programme, can provide a solution to this. When scaling up Housing First it must be considered how pet-friendly accommodation can become readily available and easily accessible to its clients.

Recommendations:

The APPG strongly recommends the Government works with people with direct experience of Housing First to inform and shape services.

- During the inquiry the APPG heard from 65 people with direct experience of using Housing First services. Their voices were resoundingly clear on the aspects of Housing First which worked particularly well:
 - The importance of having a safe and secure home
 - The intensive personalised support that a Housing First programme entails, particularly in the first few days of moving into a new home
 - The choice and control given to clients
 - How it allowed clients to think optimistically about their future
 - How other services had previously failed to address their multiple needs and facilitate their recovery²⁶
- The voices of those with experience of Housing First must be central to informing the process and designing of scaling up services, shaping services and overseeing their development and delivery. This should include considerations for the recruitment and development of the workforce that delivers these critical services.
- This reflects a similar commitment made by the Westminster Government in the Rough Sleeping Strategy 2018 to include people with lived experience into future updates of the strategy.²⁷

²⁶ The volume of testimony received was too rich to be captured in this report alone and thus another document that will showcase the voices of these lived experiences will be published later this year.

²⁷ Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (2018) *Rough Sleeping Strategy* https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/733421/Rough-Sleeping-Strategy_WEB.pdf

4. What key elements are needed to ensure the success of Housing First roll out?

The organisation testimonies submitted to the APPG inquiry also made clear there were a number of policy areas that would need addressing to ensure Housing First is both sustainable, and can be scaled up as needed to meet demand and support the Government to deliver its commitment to end rough sleeping by the end of this Parliament.

These included:

Providing sustainable funding for open-ended support services

A clear challenge raised by all organisations which submitted evidence to the APPG's inquiry was the serious concern around the current lack of sustainable funding of Housing First services – specifically the contrast between the Housing First principle of open-ended support and the reality of short-term funding arrangements. One organisation delivering Housing First in Maidstone, Kent said the following:

“The main barrier to operating Housing First at scale is funding. Quite simply, it is extremely hard to secure long term funding for Housing First projects. This in turn makes it hard to deliver on the principle of support for as long as is needed.”

This provision of long-term support under Housing First is at complete odds with the reality of current funding arrangements in

England. Many organisations find it extremely difficult or even are unable to secure long-term sustainable funding for delivering their Housing First services. Most Housing First organisations are backed by a patchwork of various funding sources, including local authority budgets, public health funding, Adult Social Care personal budgets, and funding from philanthropic trusts and foundations.

As well as being made up of several sources, funding is also often only secured for a short time period - Homeless Link told the APPG's inquiry evidence session that 40% of Housing First projects have contracts that are one year or less, with this figure rising to 83% with contracts of three years or less. This reflects a critical barrier to scaling up Housing First services around England - while support is not meant to be time-bound, funding arrangements are highly likely to be. This can be problematic as it can limit the security and stability which can be provided to clients, which is often so crucial in their recovery and what prevents them from returning to a life of homelessness in the long term. Importantly it can also create an abundance of uncertainty and even funding gaps for providers of Housing First services.

The damaging impact of these short-term funding arrangements is clear in the testimony provided by individuals who are supported by the government-funded Housing First pilots in England. During

the inquiry the APPG heard from multiple individuals currently part of the pilot in Greater Manchester, and who face a cliff edge of support from 2022 onwards. The impact of this funding reality was a worry to users, with one woman expressing her deep concern over her Housing First support ending shortly:

“I am going to be lost...I felt myself over the past few weeks get upset a lot because right now where I'm going through a bit of a **** time do you know what I mean, I could do with her now and I know we ain't going to have her there.”

Another individual in a different Housing First service said the following on the worry around the future of funding:

“Housing First, Adullam and also the help from drug workers and counsellors I wouldn't be here. Absolute life savers. My only concern now is that the service might only be funded for another year, and I'm worried about what might happen if the support is no longer there. This is the most stable position my life has ever been in, but I still need the support. I wish more people knew just how much of a difference this makes.”

Since 2018, funding for Housing First services in England has been increasingly provided by the RSI, where local authorities and organisations providing homelessness services can bid for funding. However, this is only allocated or awarded for a year at a time, creating acute uncertainty for providers and users of Housing First. One organisation told the APPG:

“The Government's Rough Sleeping Initiative has enabled immediate positive change. However, its impact is reduced by the current restriction to one-year funding which denies any opportunity for longer-term planning of services and support.”

Another organisation said its Housing First programme had successfully been funded through the RSI, but that this was unsustainable as they faced funding “cliff edges”, leaving clients and staff vulnerable, and partners without the necessary assurance of Housing First support being secured on an ongoing basis.

These funding arrangements exacerbate existing challenges – the homelessness sector has experienced extensive cuts over the past decade, leaving funding for many vital services in a precarious state. Research by WPI Economics, commissioned by Homeless Link and St Mungo's found that since 2008, nearly £1 billion has been cut from local authorities spending on homelessness services every year.²⁸ Other analysis by the Centre for Social Justice found that cuts to local authorities' addiction services in England were typically around 30%, with some councils cutting as much as 50% in the past decade.²⁹ Furthermore, despite receiving welcome funding from national government, the impact of the pandemic has undoubtedly placed an additional strain on local authority finances. One local authority that submitted to the APPG's inquiry said:

“Housing First is already in a number of Local Authority homelessness strategies. But they are stated as aspirations or intentions to apply for central government funding. Everything comes back to central government providing long-term funding on a national basis.”

²⁸ WPI Economics (2019) *Local authority spending on homelessness. Understanding recent trends and their impact* <https://www.mungos.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Local-authority-spending-on-homelessness.pdf>

²⁹ The Centre for Social Justice (2019) *Road to Recovery: Addiction in our society – the case for reform*. London, The Centre for Social Justice.

Going forward, funding for Housing First programmes should be provided on a sustainable and longer-term basis, anticipating that clients will need on going support for the foreseeable future. This aspect of Housing First programme is critical to its success – the APPG heard from several individuals with experience of Housing First services around the importance of long-term support:

“I would love it to continue longer, because it’s going so well for me and I think where I’m at because of the life skills I learnt a different set of skills because I had to live quite feral, so my skills don’t work in society, so in order to integrate me into society I need to learn a new set of skills that my support worker is teaching me. And I’m scared that the clock’s going to run out and I’m not going to have the time to be able to put all these things in and have the ability to stand on my own two feet.”

Organisations and individuals who contributed to the APPG inquiry were clear that they did not expect funding arrangements to be allocated infinitely. However, what was needed was clarity, certainty and commitment to longer-term funding in the future, to enable confidence and trust in the provision of services in the longer-term, and avoid the risk of funding gaps. The current lack of confidence in and clarity over funding streams significantly inhibits the ability to successfully scale up Housing First across England.

Analysis suggests that an annual support budget of £150.3 million for three years to deliver 16,450 Housing First places in England, totalling a budget of £451million.³⁰ Analysis by the Centre for Social Justice found that these costs would be more than

offset by savings across health, criminal justice and the homelessness sectors. This means that for each £1 spent there is an overall saving on the cost of service provision of £1.56.³¹ This will ensure that flexible support can be provided to clients, and the stakeholders can receive the necessary assurances as to the future of services.

Additionally, while funding and responsibility will lie with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG), the Government should consider a joint funding pot with part funding from other departments that are likely to benefit from scaling up Housing First services across England – the Department of Health and Social Care, Home Office, Ministry of Justice and the Department for Work and Pensions. This will acknowledge the vast array of positives that Housing First can bring across the statutory services and that it has the potential to be much more than an intervention to end someone’s homelessness. This funding settlement should include an evaluation of potential cost savings across different government departments.

Research by the Centre for Social Justice found that for each £1 spent there is an overall saving on the cost of service provision of £1.56

Recommendations:

The Government should pledge to provide sustainable funding for Housing First services across England.

In all testimonies submitted to the APPG inquiry by organisations that deliver Housing First there was a clear need for more sustainable and long-term funding arrangements now, and in any future scaling up of services. Government should:

- Commit to an annual budget of £150.3 million for three years to deliver at least 16,450 Housing First places across England.
- Establish a joint funding pot based in MHCLG with part funding from HO, DHSC, MOJ, DWP with a commitment to monitoring the benefits of Housing First across different departments.
- Create a ‘Housing First’ funding stream through local authorities which will refocus the RSAP so that bids can be made to provide and deliver homes with longer tenancies for Housing First programmes. This could offer local providers of Housing First the opportunity to bid for longer-term funding. This acknowledges the need for longer provision of support under Housing First, and brings very welcome certainty into the local delivery of services.

A national vision of cross-collaboration across Housing First services could deliver an array of benefits for organisations delivering services locally

Achieving cross-departmental collaboration and multi-agency working in Housing First delivery

It is clear from the APPG’s inquiry that Housing First is more than an intervention to end homelessness - it can trigger and sustain several positive changes across an individual’s life with regards to physical and mental health, contact with the criminal justice system, reliance on welfare and facilitating social and community integration. At the start of their Housing First journey, support workers will create plans for their clients to address and tackle the issues that compound their homelessness. By the nature of the client group, this support is likely to include engagement with multiple statutory services, and different agencies from several sectors.

Subsequently, it is critical that when scaling up Housing First services across England, the Government takes the opportunity to establish a cross-departmental approach to ending homelessness, driving and embedding a collaborative and joined-up multi-agency way of working at a local level, which will in turn improve client outcomes, by removing gatekeeping, siloes and inaccessible thresholds of care.

Indeed, Dr Sam Tsemberis, the creator and founder of the Housing First model, told an APPG inquiry evidence session that scaling up Housing First across England necessitates “inter-ministerial integration and inter-governmental collaboration” - a collaborative and cooperative approach across different government departments to deliver these outcomes for its clients. He went on to say that Housing First does typically become the “responsibility of the housing ministry,” and that is “essential but not sufficient” for the successful scaling up of services.

Maggie Brünjes, Chief Executive of Homeless Network Scotland, also expressed this point during a different APPG inquiry session, saying – “No sector or organisation can

³⁰ This is to fund an additional 13,850 places at £8,600 would require an annual support budget of £119.1 million, a £21 million fund for personal budget costs (at £1,500 per place or £500 per annum over the three years) and a £28 million fund for specialist mental health support staff (0.3 FTE specialist worker supporting 20 Housing First clients at a cost of £12,000 per annum). The cost per place per annum is £9,700. This is in addition to funding currently available for Housing First services through the pilots, RSI and other funding sources and any due to be provided through the first tranche of RSAP funding.

³¹ Centre for Social Justice (2021) *Close to Home* <https://www.centreforsocialjustice.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/CSJ-Close-to-Home-2021.pdf>

deliver Housing First alone,” and “better integration across health and social care, and housing will enable scaling up and help strategically and with delivery on the ground.”

This national vision of cross-collaboration across Housing First services could deliver an array of benefits for organisations delivering services locally, including shared responsibility driving longer and more sustainable funding, producing opportunities for effective partnerships and the possibility of specific and effective pathways for a client’s recovery. It could drive the linkage between Housing First services with other common support services, in particular, access to health services such as drug and alcohol misuse services, mental health services, primary care and social inclusion support services.

Many organisational testimonies that were submitted to the APPG’s inquiry were clear that, in scaling up Housing First services across England, improvements were particularly needed to better integrate housing and health services, and that improved ‘buy-in’ of Housing First across departments and statutory services was necessary to facilitate the positive outcomes typically associated with the programme. Many organisations stated that they faced barriers in trying to access support services for their clients, most notably in regards to dual diagnosis and mental health services.

For example, in their submission to the APPG’s inquiry, staff from the Greater Manchester Housing First pilot said one of the main challenges faced by the programme is access to appropriate mental health services within the city-region. This is significant given the high frequency of mental ill-health among Housing First clients, which compounds their homelessness, and subsequently, limited access to services may impede their recovery. For example, out of 171 assessments of clients on the Greater Manchester pilot, 144 had mental health

issues, 148 experienced drug misuse and 140 had dual diagnosis. This limited access to some statutory services is rarely for want of trying - as Homeless Link’s Director of Social Change, Fiona Colley told an APPG inquiry evidence session – many Housing First workers act as invaluable advocates for their clients but can’t always break through gatekeeping or bureaucracy they encounter.

Testimonies stated that changes to drug and alcohol recovery pathways are also needed when scaling up Housing First, to enable clients can access services quickly and securely. The following from NOAH Enterprise’s submission to the APPG makes this clear:

“Both outreach workers and clients who were interviewed said that drug recovery pathways are not always joined up and they certainly are not easy. There were gaps in time at each stage of the recovery journey, from the delays caused by “jumping through hoops” to get methadone prescription, to delays in attending detox, to further delays and waiting for a place in rehab. These gaps in time presented numerous difficulties for clients as they led to more chances of relapsing and undoing any progress obtained up to that point....Similarly, outreach workers and clients also spoke of there being cases of a lack of joined up post-recovery care after people had left rehabilitation.”

The provision of in-house specialists, for example dual diagnosis practitioners, were seen as essential by several organisations to help mitigate the impact of difficulties accessing health services. The pilots in Manchester and Liverpool both provide mental health specialists as part of the Housing First service. Ipswich Housing First has a dedicated primary mental health nurse which was funded by the RSI. In their submission to the APPG they stated:

“He prefers to retain patients in primary care (i.e. under him) to save the cycle of discharge and re-admission. This approach is working for us and would surely work for others.”

An individual using the Housing First service in Rotherham also spoke to the value of an in-house counsellor:

“I know I need some counselling and its brilliant that Rotherham Housing First have got their own counsellor...it’s a big deal to have someone in the team you can have counselling with. It’s good.”

Organisations also noted better integration being needed with the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP). Here the WMCA pilot provides an useful example of the value of close working relationship with local services, with DWP staff represented the Steering Group and Operational Group for the programme. Under this service, Housing First pilot clients are flagged on the DWP systems as vulnerable, and as a result this helps to tailor engagement with clients who often have a deep and established mistrust of official services. Housing First staff are also notified of any upcoming changes to clients payments, for example, changes to benefits claims, which allows them to plan and implement appropriate actions to prevent clients’ risky behaviour. Support workers also engage with DWP to facilitate alternative payment arrangements for clients of Housing First, to avoid any difficulties with landlords or build up of arrears.

Clearly there are several useful examples of cross-departmental and multi-agency working in Housing First services across England, both in regards to best practice and areas to improve when scaling up services. To oversee this, the Government could establish a Housing First National Director who is based in the Ministry of Housing,

Communities and Local Government to provide leadership, and guide coordination of Housing First services between the Department of Health and Social Care, Department of Work and Pensions, the Home Office and the Ministry of Justice. This cross-departmental collaboration will help to foster buy-in at the top level to improve the chances that they are all, in the words of one outreach worker speaking to the Centre for Social Justice for their Close to Home report, “singing from the same hymn sheet” as services are scaled up across England.³² This role of National Director of Housing First has existed in Ireland since 2018 and is held by Bob Jordan. Jordan was responsible for developing a plan for nationally rolling out Housing First across Ireland, and continues to drive this scaling up of services and ensuring Government targets are met.

This collaboration at the top level should be reflected at local level by the establishment of multi-disciplinary teams (MDTs). The pilot in Greater Manchester illustrates the value of such teams which are made up of representatives from a number of services including housing, adult social care, health and alcohol/drug services, and street outreach teams, police, probation plus any other relevant agencies. These teams meet regularly and break down local silos, identify barriers to accessing services and encourage collaboration. This approach can provide benefits to the service user, as demonstrated by this caseworker speaking of their client:

“Chris flourished with this kind of support. I believe it made him feel secure in the knowledge that there’s more than just one person working in the community that has his best interests in mind, willing and able to solve any issue he had or ones we could see happening.”

Recommendations:

In its vision for scaling up Housing First Government must drive cross-departmental collaboration and cooperation across the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Communities, the Department of Work and Pensions, the Ministry of Justice, the Home Office and the Department of Health and Social Care by implementing a national Housing First Director.

Government should acknowledge the whole-systems benefits that Housing First can deliver and reflect this in its vision for scaling up across England at the highest level. A cross-departmental approach will be critical to underpinning and maximising the impact of a national roll out of Housing First, to drive and embed a collaborative and joined-up approach at a local level to improve client outcomes.

- The implementation of a national Housing First Director will play a vital role in this, fostering integration and guiding collaboration across Government departments, beyond the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government.
- The Government should consider establishing MDTs at a local level, bringing together key stakeholders across housing, health, social care, police, probation, addiction services, outreach teams to encourage the breaking down of local silos, identifying barriers to accessing services and encouraging collaboration.
- Clear from organisational testimony were the barriers to accessing appropriate mental health support for clients with the most serious of ill-health, and how provision of support for this group remains a problem. Consequently, the inclusion of specialist mental health posts within

Housing First teams should be considered, alongside an effort to establish clear lines of access for Housing First clients to NHS mental health services.

Tailoring Housing First services to meet the needs of different groups of people most likely to need these services

Another key element in the delivery of Housing First that came through the APPG inquiry was the importance of tailoring services to different groups of people that are most likely to be at risk of rough sleeping or homelessness, for example young people, prison-leavers and women.

There are several fantastic examples of Housing First working for young people experiencing or at risk of experiencing homelessness. Housing First for Youth (HF4Y) is an adapted version of the standard Housing First model that targets young people, and has been trialled in Ireland, Canada and Scotland. Alongside immediate access to safe and affordable housing it provides the necessary and age-appropriate support to these young adults with regards to health, wellbeing, social inclusion, education and employment.³³ In Scotland, the charity Rock Trust has been delivering a Housing First pilot for care leavers aged between 16-25 who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless since 2017. Ninety-two per cent of young people involved in the project have successfully sustained their tenancies and 100% remain engaged with the support throughout the project.³⁴

Housing First also has great potential to end the homelessness of prison leavers. People leaving prison are at high risk of homelessness for a number of various reasons, including being homeless before

entering prison, substance addiction or being unable to find accommodation on release. For example at a APPG evidence session, one individual with direct experience of homelessness shared that he received no support on release from prison – he was only handed a sleeping bag when he left. He subsequently spent many nights rough sleeping in shop doorways and around the city centre. With the support of Housing First, he told the APPG that he was now sober, for the first time since he was nine years old, and had sustained his tenancy for 15 months so far. He went on to say that Housing First had enabled him to “experience hope for the first time” in his life, and that he now felt he could be a “productive member of society.”

During this inquiry the APPG also heard evidence of the impact and importance of delivering Housing First services specifically tailored to women. There is a well-established link between violence against women and girls (VAWG) and homelessness, from both academic research and the expertise of frontline services providing homelessness support.

Solace Women’s Aid told the APPG that violence against women and girls – including domestic abuse, sexual violence, and so-called honour-based violence – is the single biggest cause of women’s homelessness. One in five of Crisis’ clients who are women reported that domestic abuse was the direct cause of their homelessness, and a 2018 report by St Mungo’s found that 54% of their female residents had experienced violence or abuse from a partner or family members and 33% said domestic abuse contributed to them becoming homeless.³⁵ A 2018 evidence review by the University of York reported that “experience of domestic violence and abuse is near-universal among women who become homeless.”³⁶

To truly meet their target of ending rough sleeping by 2024, the Government should look to address the specific needs of women experiencing homelessness, and avoid the gender-blind approach which has dominated service provision traditionally, and that has often unintentionally placed barriers that have discouraged vulnerable women from accessing them.³⁷ Some women avoid ‘traditional’ services, because they feel threatened or unsafe in temporary or supported housing, emergency accommodation and other services for lone homeless adults. This has also been clear over the last 18 months throughout the response to the pandemic – the hotel provision during the pandemic was either women-only accommodation but for low support needs – so they would not accept women with multiple and complex needs; or male-dominated mixed-gender provision which is not always appropriate as many women can feel unsafe and re-traumatised in male-dominated environments.

One individual with experience of using mixed accommodation services told the APPG:

“I had this problem where it’s hard to come back outside your bedroom door once you got in, because of the kind of people that were around, especially in a mixed accommodation where there was a lot of guys, and it put me in a place where I felt uncomfortable wearing makeup or washing because I was getting a lot of unwanted attention.”

Another woman shared the following:

“I’d spent years in a lot of very unsafe places: rough sleeping, night shelters and sofa-surfing. I stopped washing at one point because I found out that when I smelled of body odour

33 Housing First Europe Hub (2020) *Housing First for Youth (HF4Y)* - <https://housingfirsteurope.eu/housing-first-for-youth/>

34 Housing First Europe Hub (2020) *Housing First for Youth (HF4Y)* - <https://housingfirsteurope.eu/housing-first-for-youth/>

35 St. Mungo’s (2018) *Women and Rough Sleeping: A Critical Review of Current Research and Methodology* - <https://www.mungos.org/publication/women-and-rough-sleeping-a-critical-review/>

36 St. Mungo’s (2018) *Women and Rough Sleeping: A Critical Review of Current Research and Methodology* - <https://www.mungos.org/publication/women-and-rough-sleeping-a-critical-review/>

37 Mayock, P. & Bretherton, J. (Eds) (2016) *Women’s homelessness in Europe*, London: Palgrave MacMillan.

people were less likely to try and force themselves on me.”

Scaling up Housing First and including specific provision for women could provide an opportunity to help women experiencing homelessness and violence, integrating recovery from multiple issues or traumas into one service. Critically, this would relieve pressure on essential domestic abuse services that do not have the resources or capacity to provide the intensive support this group of women require to end their homelessness.

Across England there are some incredible Housing First initiatives designed specifically for women, and survivors of domestic abuse and gendered violence. At an APPG’s inquiry session we heard from Louisa Steele and Rhiannon Barrow, from Standing Together and Solace Women’s Aid respectively, who deliver a Housing First programme for survivors of VAWG in Westminster, funded by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government. This is one of only a handful of women-only Housing First services in England, and one of the first where support is delivered by a specialist women’s service provider, Solace Women’s Aid, with all support workers trained in VAWG.

With the project commencing service delivery in August 2019, the emerging outcomes data are encouraging - eight out of nine women housed have maintained their tenancies. The first two women housed in November 2019 have now maintained their tenancy for over a year, and two have been accepted into college. These outcomes are significant - all of these women had experience of sleeping rough for many years prior to Housing First and most had had some engagement with supported housing in the past but had been unable to sustain it.

The organisations who provide these services to women were clear that provision of Housing First which included specialist women’s organisations can effectively tackle homelessness and trauma among women. Scaling up offers a chance for the Government to meet their manifesto commitments to end rough sleeping by the end of this Parliament, and to support all survivors of domestic abuse. For one of these organisations, “there was no doubt” that scaling up Housing First for women can go some way towards helping the Government deliver its manifesto to end rough sleeping in England. For example, Housing First schemes in Islington and Westminster support around half of the known number of rough sleeping women in each borough.

Some women avoid ‘traditional’ services, because they feel threatened or unsafe in temporary supported housing, emergency accommodation and other services for lone homeless adults.

When scaling up Housing First services and designing specific provision for women, evidence shows the following elements are key:

Placing trauma-informed and specialist support care at the centre of the Housing First service

Whilst intensive and specialist support is central to all Housing First services, the complex trauma experienced by women, which often involves gendered violence, means that specialist trauma-informed care must be at the centre of the service. Women’s sustained engagement with support services relies on the trust that comes with the expertise provided by specialist organisations.

Further, a high proportion of women with experience of homelessness and multiple needs have often lost children to the care system. This can be a massive traumatic experience which remains largely unacknowledged by public services in England – and there have been calls for more training for social workers and allied workers in this area.³⁸ Under Housing First, specialist services should take a proactive approach in working with women who have had children removed from them, to consider whether and how positive reconnection with children might be possible.

Securing safe accommodation for women

Safety planning must be a priority throughout the initial acquisition of accommodation and should underpin future support. In particular, provision of accommodation in a safe geographic location is paramount. Housing First services must ensure where needed the

house provided is a safe distance from perpetrators or previous partners, who can continue to threaten and abuse clients. For example in their submission to the APPG’s inquiry Solace Women’s Aid stated that:

“One of the women we worked with while still street homeless was frequently subjected to her partner hiding in a nearby bush whenever she talked to us, behaviour that was intended to be threatening to her and to her caseworker.”

Integrating Housing First in local and regional strategies to tackle violence against women and girls

Research shows that experience of domestic abuse and violence is near universal among women who experience rough sleeping, and that Housing First can work well for this group when specialist support are provided alongside generic services. In scaling up Housing First local and regional authorities, particularly conurbations, should be strongly encouraged to integrate Housing First into their wider VAWG strategy, to reflect the intrinsic connection between them both, and support local efforts to tackle them. For example, the success of a local scheme led to Islington Council commissioning it as part of its wider VAWG strategy for another three years when the original contract ended.

³⁸ Broadhurst, K., Mason, C., Bedston, S., Alrouh, B., Morriss, L., McQuarrie, T., Palmer, M., Shaw, M., Harwin, J. and Kershaw, S. (2017) *Vulnerable Birth Mothers and Recurrent Care Proceedings: Final Report*, Lancaster: Lancaster University.

Recommendations:

In scaling up Housing First specific provision of services should be established for people at higher risk of homelessness and rough sleeping, including for women.

Research shows that experience of domestic abuse and violence is near universal among women who experience rough sleeping, and that Housing First can work well for this group when specialist support is provided alongside generic services. The APPG heard from several organisations about the substantial role Housing First could play in supporting those women with experiences of long-term homelessness and the most serious needs, and that specific provision of Housing First for women can help the Government deliver its manifesto to end rough sleeping in England. In providing this specific provision the Government must:

- Commit to providing trauma-informed and specialist support alongside the generic Housing First services
- Work closely with the domestic abuse sector to guarantee best practice in these areas
- Make securing safe accommodation for women an immediate priority
- Enable female clients to make a house their home through personalised funds
- Encourage local and regional authorities to integrate Housing First into their wider strategies tackling violence against women and girls

Securing an adequate supply of appropriate housing to deliver Housing First

Fundamental to the Housing First model is the principle that providing someone with quick access to a home is the first step to their recovery and rebuilding a life away from homelessness. An adequate supply of appropriate housing is essential to the success of scaling up Housing First services across England.

Most Housing First services use a combination of different types of housing from the private rented sector, local authorities and housing associations to provide homes to their clients. Despite this variety of houses often sourced, a lack of affordable, accessible housing stock is consistently cited as one of the key challenges in extending Housing First provision. While this issue does look different across the various geographic locations in England, all organisational testimony submitted to the APPG emphasised a lack of appropriate housing for clients, specifically securing sufficient one bedroom apartments.

Additionally, Housing First clients, often experience serious ill-health, so it is likely that some individuals may have physical health needs impacting the type of property needed, for example, homes that have ground floor access for people with mobility difficulties. Organisations told us that acquiring properties often takes a lot of time for staff as they source properties individually for each client, with success often dependent on establishing of good relations by support workers.

All three Housing First pilots have struggled to secure a sufficient supply of housing. In their submission to the APPG's inquiry, the West Midlands Combined Authority pilot stated the inadequate supply of properties for clients was the central issue impeding the pilot's success. Indeed, Andy Street told an APPG inquiry session that the acute lack of appropriate housing was the "primary reason" the pilot was behind their original target. This was not a unique problem in the West Midlands – it was evident in all of the testimonies submitted to the APPG by organisations delivering Housing First. Often successfully securing the necessary housing for their clients was the result of hard work of staff, and focused and local influencing, and reflected a wider structural problem of limited housing supply and affordability.

Since the mid-1980s social housing delivery has fallen dramatically, and the number of homes delivered for social rent – the most affordable type of provision – has not exceeded 7,000 in the last five years. There continues to be a net reduction in social housing stock each year.³⁹ Additionally, this decline in social housing is acutely experienced by people who are rough sleeping. Research by St Mungo's from 2020 into people who have slept rough's access to social housing found that the proportion of single homeless people who move into social housing has decreased dramatically, falling by 44% in 10 years in comparison to a 24% fall across all other groups.⁴⁰

The lack of investment in social housing has and will continue to restrict the success of Housing First in England, particularly due to its suitability for Housing First programmes and clients - tenancies are more likely to be offered on a longer-term basis at more affordable rents, which are then more likely to be covered by housing benefit.

The problems of sourcing housing is demonstrated by the following quote from a Housing First worker in St. Mungo's service in Hammersmith and Fulham:

"Despite the council being really on board... the lack of suitable council housing has been a challenge. Often our clients require housing away from particular areas (for safety etc.), or properties suitable for their support needs (ground floor etc.) and due to being quite a small & highly populated borough, this has meant our clients have waited sometimes for a year or more to be housed. It has also been difficult to procure PRS properties for our clients as landlords are difficult to get on board with the service & the nature of the support needs of our clients."

Evidently, without government action the lack of suitable and appropriate housing will severely restrict the success of scaling up Housing First in England. Investment in social housing is particularly essential. Currently, Housing First workers compete within a limited pool of one bedroom flats, often against others in housing need or against different programmes also aimed at tackling homelessness.

Furthermore, Housing First staff continue to find it challenging to find properties in the private rented sector within existing Local Housing Allowance rates. As the Centre for Social Justice report *Close to Home* stated:

"Today, the Government spends over four times as much on housing benefit as it does on investment in truly affordable homes."

³⁹ Lived tales on affordable housing supply – GOV UK (www.gov.uk)

⁴⁰ St. Mungo's (2021) *Home for Good: the role of social housing in ending rough sleeping* <https://www.mungos.org/publication/home-for-good-the-role-of-social-housing-in-ending-rough-sleeping-summary-report/>

The CSJ has also called on the Government to revive the One Nation Conservative tradition of delivering truly affordable housing.⁴¹ In addition to fulfilling their political commitment to levelling up the country, delivering more affordable housing would increase the supply of homes available to help local authorities tackle rough sleeping, and the availability of appropriate housing for schemes such as Housing First.

Testimony to the APPG's inquiry was also clear that in the short-term, targeted interventions area very much needed to improve access to existing homes for Housing First places now, and if services are scaled up across England. Evident from organisational testimony submitted to the APPG was that the Government should review allocation policies for social housing, and consider allocating a certain amount of social housing places to people under Housing First services.

Currently some local authorities ration their limited supply of social housing by restricting who can go onto their waiting lists – for example by excluding people who have a history of rent arrears, anti-social behaviour, criminal convictions or who haven't lived in an area for long enough. The majority of local authorities have introduced such criteria which makes it extremely challenging for many people with experience or history of rough sleeping to access social housing.⁴²

Housing First clients' access to social housing

- **58%** of local authorities in England prevent some people with a history of rent arrears from joining their social housing waiting list. This rises to 66% in the local authorities with the top 50 highest levels of rough sleeping recorded in 2019, and 70% amongst the top ten areas.
- **98%** of councils have some form of restriction for people with a history of anti-social behaviour.
- **74%** of social housing allocations policies in all areas also have restrictions related to a history of offending or criminal behaviour.⁴³

In an APPG inquiry session Dr Sam Tsemberis told attendees that the lack of social housing is a common problem for Housing First services across Europe. He went on to say that countries successfully overcome this by typically setting aside 10% of all yearly vacancies of social housing for people sleeping rough, and fast track people who are coming out of homelessness into social housing. To maximise the success of scaling up Housing First, the Government should consider the impact of blanket restrictions, and look to address eligibility and barriers to access, ensuring that the personal circumstances of clients of Housing First and others in housing need are able to be taken into account in the process of allocating social housing.

These restrictions mean that increasingly Housing First services look to the private rented sector for the provision of homes for clients. However, Housing First staff find it extremely difficult to acquire homes in the private rented sector, as in many areas of England (particularly in cities and conurbations where homelessness numbers are higher), few properties fall within the Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rates, and are too expensive for clients to afford. This is epitomised by the following Housing First worker, based in Brighton:

"Housing's a massive [problem]...An average wait for a council property is several years long, which is absolutely not a realistic option for us. Privately rented sector is extremely difficult to enter... Very few properties are within the Local Housing Allowance, so they are usually a lot more expensive, the rent, rent-wise it's a lot more expensive that the Housing Benefit can cover."

The Government should commit to continuing to invest in Local Housing Allowance so it can cover the bottom third of rents, for at least this Parliamentary term. This will give landlords, Housing First services and their clients the necessary assurances and security for continuity of payment of rent.

Additionally, private landlords may be seen as inherently more reluctant to let properties to people with histories of homelessness, with regards to fears about anti-social behaviour, the impact on neighbours as well as arrears and damage to property, particularly in areas of high demand for housing. Therefore, in scaling up Housing First services, there is a need to incentivise the private rented sectors' engagement and inclusion, as organisations' success in this area show that private renting can play a useful, targeted role in the provision of homes for Housing First. This was strongly apparent across organisational testimonies submitted to the APPG, with many highlighting their own good practice in this area.

41 CSJ (2020) *The Great Recovery: A post Covid deal for Great Britain*, London, CSJ.

42 St. Mungo's (2021) *Home for Good: the role of social housing in ending rough sleeping* <https://www.mungos.org/publication/home-for-good-the-role-of-social-housing-in-ending-rough-sleeping-summary-report/d>

43 St. Mungo's (2021) *Home for Good: the role of social housing in ending rough sleeping* <https://www.mungos.org/publication/home-for-good-the-role-of-social-housing-in-ending-rough-sleeping-summary-report/>

Best practice in the private rented sector for Housing First

The importance of a coordinator role -

Ensuring there is a well-established and effective working relationship between a Housing First worker and the provider of the properties. This can be fundamental for housing access and tenancy sustainment as Housing First workers can maintain regular contact to identify and prevent any potential problems, as well as providing assurances to the landlord of rent payment.

Consider landlord insurance - Where a council is willing, they can provide assurances to landlords around any potential losses due to rent arrears or property damage through Landlords Insurance. This is the case in the WMCA pilot in Sandwell, who are working with Help2Rent to access the landlords insurance, offering contents cover up to £20,000, cover for malicious damage by tenants, legal expenses cover up to £50,000 for eviction and rent guarantee (up to six months, max £2000 a month). In return landlords do not charge a bond or any fees.

Good communication strategies - To foster and encourage engagement from housing providers, particularly those in the private rented sector, Housing First organisations should employ communication strategies, including the use of social media, regular newsletters and communications to promote and celebrate successful stories. Communicating these good examples can demonstrate the impact of the service and help landlords feel engaged and encouraged to get involved.

Holding landlord engagement events – To introduce landlords and housing providers to the Housing First concept and encourage their participation, Housing First organisations should consider holding events to outline what role they can play in supporting housing crisis and ending homelessness. An event like this was organised in Greater Manchester, with the Greater Manchester Mayor and the Mayor of Salford speaking. The event was well-attended with over 50 landlords and letting agents present, and generated a number of warm leads for properties and future relationships.

Recommendations:

Key to the success of any Housing First service is the ability to secure appropriate properties in sufficient numbers, and of adequate quality and affordability. As it stands, the acquisition of sufficient suitable properties is widely considered as one of the greatest challenges to scaling up Housing First. **Any efforts to scale up Housing First in England must be underpinned by a commitment to deliver additional social housing, including:**

- To increase social housing supply in the short term, the Government should bring forward its **£12.2 billion** Affordable Homes Programme.
- It must also commit to building **90,000 additional homes for social rent** per year that research by Heriot Watt University has identified are needed to meet the scale of housing required by people on the lowest incomes.

This would go a far way in addressing the homes needed for at least 16,450 one bedroom Housing First places, as well addressing wider housing need and social injustices.

It was also clear from the testimony of organisations delivering Housing First that submitted evidence to the APPG's inquiry was that targeted interventions are very much needed in the short-term to improve access to existing housing stock. The Government should:

- Instruct local authorities to identify local need for Housing First, and to provide solutions to meet this need.

- Review blanket restrictions on allocations policy that lock out people who are or have been homeless from social housing applications.
- Commit to continuing to invest in Local Housing Allowance so it can cover the bottom third of rents, for at least this Parliamentary term. This will give landlords, Housing First services and their clients the necessary assurances and security for continuity of payment of rent.
- Encourage the incentivisation of the private rented sector in the provision of homes for Housing First by sharing and celebrating best practice in this area.

Any efforts to scale up Housing First in England must be underpinned by a commitment to deliver additional social housing.

Conclusion

“Housing First is needed by all people like myself, I think people get lost in the system and they are usually the ones that need the help the most, it needs to be expanded everywhere. If it can help me move forwards with my life it can help everyone. I keep falling over but with support I am not giving up.”

Evidence received throughout the course of this inquiry has made clear the important role Housing First plays in ending homelessness. For individuals under a Housing First service, its impact can be transformational. Beyond ending their homelessness by the rapid access to a stable and secure home, it can facilitate many changes in other areas of clients’ lives, across health, justice, social relationships and community integration.

Speaking to the APPG about looking forward in their life, many Housing First clients spoke of their plans for the future, including career aspirations, and their desire to integrate back into the community. This progress is incredible and should not be underestimated - these individuals have often faced a lifetime of trauma, destitution and homelessness, and have repeatedly failed to engage with other forms of support services. Clearly Housing First can provide individuals with stability, security and the necessary support to have a second chance at a life away from homelessness.

What also came through strongly throughout the inquiry was the opportunity facing the Government now – in the aftermath of the Everyone In initiative where 37,000 people have been supported into emergency temporary accommodation to be protected from the virus. A significant minority of these people will require Housing First programme, and the incredible support available to them under this model, as powerfully outlined by

the lived experience in this report, to end their homelessness. Without bold action from the Government to expand provision of Housing First across England, many of these people face a return to the streets or other forms of housing precarity.

As well as directly ending the homelessness of people with the multiple and serious needs, Housing First also introduces principles and a philosophy that can and should be at the heart of any homelessness system: that people should have access to a safe and secure home, and providing this quickly to people who are homeless, alongside the necessary support is the most effective way to end someone’s homelessness. Scaling up Housing First provides the first step to transition towards a ‘housing-led’ system of support – where services provide people who are facing homelessness with quick access to secure and settled accommodation before addressing any other issues they may need support with.

The Government has made a very welcome commitment to ending rough sleeping and tackling homelessness more broadly. However, without scaling up Housing First services across England, to make sure everyone who needs Housing First can access a programme, they risk jeopardising this ambition, and leaving behind the group of people who require the most help and support. This is despite the evidence from around the world, and domestically from the city-region pilots, demonstrating that Housing First can be the solution to ending the homelessness of people with the most serious and multiple needs.

The APPG for Ending Homelessness calls on the Government to commit to scaling up Housing First services across England now, and place Housing First at the centre of their plan to tackle rough sleeping and homelessness. This autumn’s Spending Review provides the Government with an ideal opportunity demonstrate their commitment to ending homelessness through Housing First, by securing the future of the city-region pilots and committing to expanding provision to other areas with the highest need. This will build upon the unprecedented progress made during the pandemic, and the necessary strides towards meeting their fast-approaching manifesto commitment of ending rough sleeping by the end of this Parliament.

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Shelter
Glassdoor
Changing Lives
The Paper Cup Project
Homeless Link
Just Life
Shared Health
The Salvation Army
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Crisis
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Noah Enterprise
Second Second
Stone Pillow
Aspire Oxford
Citizen's Advice
Emmaus
Refuge
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Just for Kids Law
Greater Manchester Combined Authority
Princes Trust
West Midlands Combined Authority
Domestic Abuse Commissioner's Office
Wates
Southwark Council
Rowana
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Two Saints
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The Northern Consortium
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Oak Foundation
P3 Charity
The Running Charity
NACCOM
Communities that work
Z2K
Creative Inclusion

The Papercup Project
Centrepont
No Second Night Out
Headway
Pathway
Changing Lives
EVAW
Riverside
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