

Appendix 1 – Housing First principles

Homeless Link are acknowledged as experts in the Housing First approach. They have developed a set of principles for the delivery of Housing First, with advice and support from the University of York, with feedback from Housing First providers and experts both in the UK and internationally. These are summarised as follows:

People have a right to a home

Bolstering the supply of affordable housing options and keeping any evictions to an absolute minimum. Removing the conditionality from the system, e.g. so people do not have to first prove they are tenancy ready, thereby earning the right to a home. The system views housing as a human right.

Flexible support is provided for as long as it is needed

Our need for support naturally fluctuates; it is almost impossible to predict exactly how much support an individual will need, around which issues and for how long. Yet support for those experiencing homelessness tends to be commissioned in time-limited blocks; some people experience 'cliff-edges' where support suddenly ends, some may be over-supported at times. Instead, a housing-led system allows for support to flex around a person in their own home when they need it.

Housing and support are separated

This separation means that the housing offer is not dependent on the support offer; so if the support comes to an end, the person does not have to move. Conversely, a person does not have to move into a buildings-based project in order to access support; and the support relationship can stay with a person where they want or need to move. Separating the support from the landlord function can also help to clarify the role of different workers, thereby building better relationships (in our research with people using the system, some felt staff are more interested in the building than the people).

Individuals have choice and control

Choice is often designed out of the service response to single homeless people: people are 'placed', 'sent', 'signposted' and, if very lucky, 'housed'. Research suggests that increasing a person's sense of choice and control improves their outcomes and that services are less effective when they are "done to people". Instead, a housing-led system treats people experiencing homelessness as adults and citizens.

The service is based on people's strengths, goals and aspirations

Seeing the person as a survivor, as an individual, as a person, rather than a problem to be managed, and recognising that everyone has strengths. In a housing-led approach, we move from assessments which focus on risks, needs and eligibility to more creative assessments which recognise the strengths, resources and relationships the person brings to the situation and works with them to consider how they can build on these.

An active engagement approach is used

Recognising that services are often 'hard-to-reach', and that closing the case of a person who is experiencing homelessness, substance use or mental health challenges because they behave in a way we find challenging is often counter-productive. Instead, professionals are responsible for proactively engaging their clients; making the service fit the individual instead of trying to make the individual fit the service.

A harm reduction approach is used

Recognising that abstinence from substance use and other potentially harmful behaviours is not desirable and/or realistic for many at this point in time, and that these individuals may disengage if pressured into abstinence by professionals. Instead, workers support

individuals to set their own goals and develop their own strategies to manage risk. A housing-led approach recognises the harm that comes from all forms of homelessness (especially rough sleeping) and seeks to reduce this by avoiding homelessness or by supporting a person to exit homelessness as quickly as possible.