



## Report of the Landlord Services Manager

Poverty Reduction Policy Development and Delivery Committee  
25 April 2018

### Homelessness - An Overview of Housing First

<b>Purpose:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• To inform the Committee of the principles and challenges of <i>Housing First</i>.</li><li>• To update the Committee on the Welsh Government's position on <i>Housing First</i>.</li><li>• To provide an update on Swansea's development of a <i>Housing First</i> project</li></ul>
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#### 1. Introduction

- 1.1 The *Housing First* approach started in the 1990's in the US and since then has been successfully adopted in Finland and other parts in Europe. In recent years there has been growing interest from both the English and Welsh Governments for Local Authorities to develop a Housing First approach in their areas.
- 1.2 Appendix A and Appendix B provides in-depth information on the background and principles of Housing First. Please note that Appendix A is a report by the Centre for Social Justice and relates to issues in England which falls under different legislation as Housing is a developed subject area. From a Swansea Council perspective, Appendix B is perhaps the more relevant information as this was provided by the Welsh Government in February 2018 and outlines their expectations for Local Authorities to develop Housing First in order to tackle homelessness and, in particular, reduce rough sleeping in Wales.

## **2. Key principles of *Housing First***

- 2.1 Housing First uses ordinary housing, such as private rented or social rented flats and is designed to house those who have had long term homeless issues (such as entrenched rough sleepers with high needs) in their own, settled homes as quickly as possible and to provide the support they will need to sustain an exit from homelessness. Thereby by-passing the 'normal' route of going into supported housing and moving on from there.
- 2.2 Service users will have choice and control. eg they have an element of choice as to where they will be housed and the level of support they receive.
- 2.3 Housing is not conditional on support or treatment, however support will be flexible, intensive and available for as long as required.
- 2.4 It is a recovery orientated approach and one of harm reduction.
- 2.5 Access to individual budgets to incentivise and empower the service user to move into accommodation.

## **3. Challenges to *Housing First***

- 3.1 Ensuring that there is support and engagement from all relevant partners/agencies/general public/service users. This is potentially the biggest challenge of all. Evidence shows that where one party doesn't engage in the process then the system can fail. Partners could include probation, housing, health, and other support services such as substance misuse organisations.
- 3.2 It can be perceived to be giving the most vulnerable preferential treatment. Eg Other service users may not get so much choice in respect of where they live, others would not have access to individual budgets, and so on.
- 3.3 It is not going to solve homelessness alone and will not eradicate rough sleeping completely. In addition, Housing First services should not be used and designed for every form of homelessness, but should be used as part of an integrated strategy that also includes prevention, new housing, and various types of supported housing projects to tackle long-term homelessness amongst vulnerable people.
- 3.4 Housing First needs a supply of affordable, adequate, secure housing which includes all registered social landlords and the private rented sector.
- 3.5 Consistent funding is required and over a long period of time. Research has shown that some of the initial Housing First pilots were unsuccessful not because they failed to deliver, but because the money ran out.

#### **4. Local Context**

- 4.1 Rough Sleeping has increased in Swansea over the past 2 years in line with the increases across Wales and the UK.
- 4.2 Whilst Swansea has some strong Supported Housing provision which has enabled us to keep the numbers of people sleeping rough to a minimum, this accommodation doesn't always provide the right solution for some entrenched rough sleepers.
- 4.3 Over the past 6 months we have tried to carry out a housing first type approach on an individual and ad-hoc basis using existing resources. Lessons have been learnt from this and we now understand that in order to have a successful housing first project it requires a dedicated team who have sufficient resources and expertise, as well as buy-in from all agencies.

#### **5. Next Steps**

- 5.1 We are aiming to develop a Housing First project in Swansea within 2018 and we are considering our options as to the most appropriate way to implement the project.
- 5.2. We will be organising a supplier event which will include partner agencies, housing and support providers to agree the best approach to be adopted in Swansea.

#### **6. Equalities and Engagement**

- 6.1 There are no equalities and engagement implications directly associated with this report however the implementation of a new Housing First Project will require an Equality Impact Assessment to be carried out.

#### **7. Financial Implications**

- 7.1 This report is for information only and there are no financial implications associated with this report. However there will be cost and resource implications for the implementation of a Housing First Project.

#### **8. Legal Implications**

- 8.1 The Housing (Wales) Act 2014 has changed the law on homelessness in Wales and provides a different framework for homelessness in the rest of the United Kingdom. For example, whilst local authorities in England and Northern Ireland are encouraged to focus on preventing homelessness where possible, their duties in respect of homelessness are not framed around prevention as the primary driver.

#### **Appendices:**

Appendix A - Housing First (Centre for Social Justice)

Appendix B - Housing First - National Principles and Guidance for Wales