



**Headlines from Housing Plus Academy Think Tank**  
***“Homelessness: A National Scandal”***  
**15<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> May 2018**

1. **Housing First is not the only solution to homelessness but is the right answer to the right people.** Housing First pilots have shown it can make a massive difference to the lives of rough sleepers with complex needs. Key to the success of Housing First is **long term housing and intensive, choice based, wrap around support** for as long as it is needed. The support is not conditional on the tenant meeting certain requirements, for example being alcohol free, as Housing First works with people with complex needs such as mental health problems and drug and alcohol misuse.
2. **To ensure the success of Housing First, local authorities need to rebuild the trust with homeless people who feel they have been let down by council services over a long period.** Frontline staff need to be persistent in understanding and responding to the complex needs of rough sleepers. Customers need time to build up relationships with staff – long term contracts and funding would help to ensure this.
3. Local authorities are taking the Homelessness Reduction Act very seriously, but the **lack of extra resources and the shortage of supply of social housing are barriers** to implementing it properly.
4. **To ensure successful homelessness prevention a Duty to Collaborate is needed.** This would ensure a joined up approach between and among private, public and voluntary sectors. Local authorities such as Islington work with a range of services such as police, health, prisons and landlords. It’s also important to have the frameworks in place to share information between services. Another example is Southwark Council, where Solace and Shelter are co-located within the council’s Housing Department and the posts fully funded by the council. This partnership working has proved very successful in supporting women who are victims of Domestic Violence.
5. **Councils need a deep culture change away from the gatekeeping role that they have become used to playing.** Staff need to take a more people-centred and asset-based approach with proper training to help ensure this happens. Working with voluntary organisations can help councils redesign their services and apply the people centred approach. For example, local authorities such as Southwark found it more useful to work in a small team with a small case load per officer, allowing them to successfully engage with customers. Some homelessness organisations advocate for employing people with lived experiences.
6. **There is a need for a National Strategy to tackle homelessness** that places homelessness as a product of wider social and economic problems such as lack of affordable housing, the increase in homelessness caused by “no fault evictions”, the impact of Right to Buy on reducing social housing stock, difficulties for young people leaving care, and an insecure job market.
7. **The decline in the supply of social housing overall as a result of the Right to Buy creates a large barrier to progress.** On the other hand, some local authorities are managing to squeeze extra supply through creative use of small infill sites on estates where the land is socially owned; converting garages, building on top of them, extending existing buildings and tightening up on empty homes all

can help with extra supply. Shared tenancies for single people can help use larger stock more effectively and offer the opportunity for peer support.

8. **Housing associations can help by opening up their access to homeless households and by providing properties to voluntary homeless charities** that they work in tandem with – the voluntary organisations can then manage the properties and supply additional support to occupants so that tenancies that would otherwise fail or be problematic can be sustained. In particular, Network Homes is doing this in collaboration with New Horizons Youth Centre, supporting homeless young people.
9. **Some housing associations avoid housing Universal Credit recipients** because rent payments can become unpredictable. Access to housing is also sometimes restricted where the Local Housing Allowance doesn't allow people receiving benefits to cover their rent, or where there is a history of unpredictable rent payments or any existing arrears. Having some kind of rent cap should in theory help keep rents within a reasonable level and this is one reason why the Local Housing Allowance was introduced. However in many parts of the country, this form of rent cap has broken down.
10. **For temporary housing to successfully help tackle homelessness it must provide wider support for people and be suitable for the needs of the individual**, for example providing a safe space for women who have been victims of domestic violence.
11. **Experiments with offering rent guarantees** have shown they can help in cases where people are in precarious jobs and may lose their ability over the short term to pay their rent. Some charities guarantee private landlords that they will receive their rent regardless of the tenant's circumstances.
12. Homeless organisations and local authorities have both found that **approaching private landlords and establishing positive relations**, negotiating rent and length of tenure can in fact avoid both evictions and conflict. Many landlords will cooperate if approached in this way.
13. It is important to recognise that **social housing is not the only option** and it is not always the best option. It is sometimes very hard to persuade applicants of this. We need private renting and private landlords, so it is important to work on improving the private rented sector. In order to achieve this, **some regulation is necessary**.
14. We should learn from the **Scottish approach to private renting**, with some limited regulation being introduced, particularly **obligatory licensing and the abolition of no-fault evictions**. There is a consensus that no fault evictions are a major cause of the rise in homelessness. There are also innovative examples of homelessness schemes in Scotland which we could learn from, specifically Social Bite in Edinburgh which has attracted widespread support.
15. Some approaches to solving homelessness have been tried by **creating a residential working community** where homeless rough sleepers are housed and fed, along with support staff, and

contribute to the community that they are living in by learning skills and helping produce either farm goods, revamped furniture, café food, etc. All of these have been found to work.

16. **It is vital to get the community on side in support of homeless projects.** For example by providing some affordable housing for local people alongside homeless people. There is a risk of over-concentrating need by using low demand and unpopular areas as the places for setting up homelessness projects as there is likely to be more available space. That overconcentration can lead to significant community opposition and conflict between the voluntary organisation and the local community. Cooperation will then break down. On the other hand, if the homelessness organisation works closely with the local community and brings wider benefits, it is then much more likely that it will work.

#### What homelessness organisations need going forward

- We need long term thinking and policy – with cross-party consensus to ensure political momentum behind work continues
- We need a joined up approach across services (health, housing, police, mental health) including more flexibility in the support given to homeless people, to ensure complex needs are supported i.e. it cannot be assumed that giving someone a house means that they will spend every night in at first – they may still spend some nights on the street
- The trailblazers show that Housing First can help, but we need continued funding and the core aims of the policy to be kept at the forefront of all pilots and projects
- There are lots of different ways of tackling homelessness that work for different people in different areas. Understanding that Housing First isn't the solution for everyone and is just one of the pieces in the mix of solutions is important, so resources should still be focussed on other schemes alongside Housing First options. Housing First options can be delivered using different models and with a focus on local contexts
- For Housing First to work, we need a cultural change in how we treat homeless people – this shift can be hard to make. We need to allow customers to build up relationships with staff. Long term contracts and funding would help to ensure this
- There are wider issues than just tackling homelessness as homelessness is an outcome of other problems: lack of affordable housing; the increase in homelessness caused by “no fault evictions”; the impact of Right to Buy on reducing social housing stock; difficulties for young people leaving care. These also need to be addressed to help solve homelessness
- We need to make best use of the existing housing stock. There are innovative ways to do this e.g. converting three bed homes that are unsuitable for families due to location into single shared lets for single people
- We need to emphasise the long-term benefits of helping to solve homelessness e.g. on police and hospital costs.