

Housing First Briefing

Purpose

To inform Members regarding the approach that has been taken by the Housing First team in Denbighshire and Conwy Council as joint beneficiaries of the Housing First Welsh Government trailblazers grant award. It will also provide an update on the current delivery milestones.

Background

Housing First is a system of support for homeless people with high and complex needs. It is designed to deliver a sustainable exit from homelessness, improve health and wellbeing and enable social integration. Housing First uses ordinary housing, such as private rented or social rented flats, as a first step to recovery. It is designed to house homeless people with high needs in their own, settled homes as quickly as possible and to provide the support they need, at their own pace, and for as long as they need it, to sustain their tenancy.

Welsh Government is encouraging the development of Housing First as part of its Rough Sleeping Action Plan (2018) and through initial funding for ten 'start-up' projects to develop and launch Housing First in different parts of the country. This follows the successful use of Housing First in many countries, including US, Canada, Finland, France and other parts of the UK.

Existing evidence suggests a tenancy sustainment success rate of around 80%; however, this is dependent on achieving a good degree of 'fidelity' with the following key principles, set out by the Welsh Government:

- Housing is a human right
- Service users should have choice and control
- Housing is not conditional on support or treatment
- The approach is recovery oriented

Housing First Conwy & Denbighshire will aim to reduce and prevent recurring and long-term homelessness by helping people to find suitable and stable housing and offering a flexible support service to those who are likely to need intensive and ongoing support in order to settle into and sustain a tenancy. Tenancy sustainment is the primary outcome by which the performance of this service should be measured and judged.



Delivery update

Conwy County Borough Council and Denbighshire County Council jointly commissioned Imogen Blood and Associates (IBA), using Welsh Government Transitional Homelessness Prevention Grant funding, to inform and begin to develop an integrated Housing First Project across their joint regions. A feasibility study was developed to inform on topics such as how cost effective Housing First would be for DCC/CBCC.

Housing First may be more expensive than some traditional supported housing models; however, it can be cost effective where it targets those for whom existing services have repeatedly failed and/or are likely to fail, and supports them to exit homelessness. Existing services (and this includes health, criminal justice and other agencies as well as homelessness services) are currently spending a lot of money on simply maintaining this cohort within the 'revolving door' of homelessness, prison, hospital, etc. Analysis for Crisis (Blood et al 2017) suggests that the Housing First model could be around five times more cost effective than current provision *for this cohort*.

During 2018, a project board was set up with key partners to aid delivery and provide a governance structure to the project. The board meet on a quarterly basis for an update on currently delivery and project milestones.

Recruitment of the Housing First Team Manager has taken place along with a team of support staff. We Hope to have the whole team in place during July 2019 and will be ready to work with our first participants.

Membership of the Housing First Network Wales which is facilitated by Cymorth Cymru has been established for DCC/CBCC. We have part of the sub groups for Mental Health and Communications. It has been noted that other areas have taken a step back from participating in these groups.

Within DCC/CBCC we have taken a measured approach to the setting up of the project. This has meant the commissioning of the feasibility study and using different recruitment methods. As a result we have taken longer to start delivery than other beneficiaries like Cardiff. This is being looked at by WG and Cymorth Cymru as the model approach to set up in relation to Housing First. Other areas are now looking to step back and learn from us.

As our model is seen as best practice we have been asked to take part in a presentation at the Housing First conference in Cardiff to show how working in a measured way and making sure we get it right first time has worked for us. We will present alongside the Cardiff team who are now looking to go back and take our measured approach.



Forward Plan

Forward planning will be to create a partnership/service level agreement with BCUHB to provide a Mental Health practitioner to work within the team. To achieve this would mean Denbighshire County Council and Conwy Borough County Council would be leading with way in terms of successfully developing this pathway.

As acceptance of the housing first system will require a culture change from within organisations the team will be running workshops with partner staff teams to get the key message of the housing first principles and our successes.

Property identification is underway with housing partners. We are currently providing feedback to Charter Housing/ Pobl Group for the newly created Housing First Charter. The charter will be something that all housing partners will be asked to sign up to. This charter sets out the key principles around choice and control.