

# How we made it work: Almond Housing Association Housing First for Youth Final report 2022

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## Executive Summary

Since 2017, Almond Housing Association (AHA) has been working in partnership with support provider, Rock Trust (RT) to deliver Housing First for Youth (HF4Y) in West Lothian, Scotland. Following the success of the pilot, and with a desire to share learning on this process, AHA commissioned Imogen Blood & Associates to carry out research to explore its contribution to HF4Y principles from their perspective as a housing provider. This included depth interviews with key staff, a survey of other staff and a review of data and costs.

### **Almond's decision to undertake a HF4Y project**

Almond Housing Association (AHA) is the largest mainstream provider of social housing in West Lothian, managing nearly 2,500 properties. AHA describes its financial performance as 'strong' and its approach to risk as 'measured'.

With AHA describing themselves as a 'traditional housing association', the decision to undertake a HF4Y project was not an obvious one, but was felt to be 'the right thing to do' for a number of reasons:

- **The association's overall financial security:** AHA had sufficient reserves and capacity within a well-run housing management service
- **Alignment with AHA values:** Staff and trustees referred to the importance of the wider role of housing providers rooted in responding to the needs of the local community, particularly those falling through the housing gaps and with experience or at risk of homelessness
- **A partner that is trusted and invested:** RT already offered a well-established support service for young people in the local area and was trusted – and known - across operational and strategic staff, as well as also financially invested in the pilot.
- **The right 'place-based' setting:** As a housing provider situated in a specific geographical location, there was an opportunity to embed a place-based preventative intervention that would benefit the whole community in the long run.
- **Leadership and passion of key staff:** The AHA Housing Support Manager was keen to support the pilot and enthused the Board who wished to encourage and nurture this passion, also identifying the importance of staff development, morale and wellbeing.
- **Breaking new ground:** Of particular interest was that HF4Y was something that had not been done previously in Scotland at that time.
- **Compromise and management of risk:** Compromises were found where necessary to support the project in its early months, for example, initially offering a Short Scottish Secure Tenancy to tenants, and later changing this to a secure tenancy.

### **Running the pilot**

A number of factors were key to the running of the pilot:

#### ***Contribution to resource:***

- One- and two-bedroom flats – initially set at 5 and then increased to 10;

- £30k in funding - this constituted just under one fifth of funding across the pilot, supporting a furniture allowance and a Housing Support Manager (2 hours per month plus ad hoc support, 1-5% of full-time equivalent post); one dedicated housing officer (initially set at 5% of FTE post).

**Single Dedicated Housing Officer (HO):** AHA provided a dedicated HO who was trained up and mentored to support all HF4Y tenants, including where young people were placed on a different officer's patch. As the project developed, the dedicated officer also introduced a 'buddy' HO to the HF4Y project in order to provide cover.

**Staff development and management:** Staff skills, style and management were assessed as being key to the success of the project. Training and mentoring were also important, including on trauma informed working practices.

**Working with the support provider:** Regular meetings cemented the relationship with the support provider to ensure the most effective ways of working together were in place to respond to support and tenancy related issues.

### Impact of Almond's involvement

There were a number of internal positive impacts on Almond as an organisation from being involved with the pilot:

- **Peer influence leading to a ripple effect:** There were examples of where learning gained through the HF4Y pilot was being cascaded across the wider housing officer team. In particular, some HOs now felt more confident accommodating younger tenants, and had practical ideas on working with young tenants (e.g. developing a behaviour contract).
- **Introducing a Trauma informed approach to other housing staff:** Other AHA staff have now attended trauma informed training, with this mainly being seen as a positive development by the staff team.
- **A more inclusive and place-based approach:** Taking part in the pilot encouraged AHA to explore similar challenges facing other groups, for example working with supported housing providers such as Women's Aid and Open Door. In addition, a new AHA Community Engagement Officer now works in partnership with a range of groups and agencies to provide improved or additional services in areas where AHA has properties.

There were also external facing impacts for Almond of being involved in HF4Y:

- **Raising the profile of AHA:** AHA's involvement in the pilot was seen as raising the organisation's profile across: the local community, regulators and Government, with other housing providers and at an international level.
- **Influencing wider policy:** AHA informants felt that the success of the HF4Y pilot had helped influence Scottish Government to scale up the Housing First model across the country, and include the needs of young people.

### Financial impacts

Almond's main expenditure was on furniture and on staff time, both to establish the partnership and the pilot, and to deliver ongoing housing management. Additionally, AHA gifted £15,000 per annum over the project life to the Rock Trust to contribute towards their running costs. This constitutes more than the operating surplus of the eight tenancies.

- **Furniture:** Average expenditure on furniture was around £4.5K per person, though this varied from £3.9K to £5.7K per tenancy. AHA reports that they were able to identify better value suppliers over time, so the young people joining the pilot later on received more furniture for their budget.
- **Housing management input:** Weekly catch-ups with Rock Trust and visits to HF4Y tenants were recorded over an 8 month period (September 2018 to April 2019) showing a monthly average of 4.75 hours' housing management time per month, costing AHA £125.50 (with on costs). However, this decreased over time once tenancies reached steady state.

In addition, AHA carried out an exercise to compare the costs related to 8 HF4Y tenants with those related to 15 younger tenants who were not part of the HF4Y project. The small numbers mean findings must therefore be interpreted with some caution, however:

- A snapshot of rent arrears suggests that, despite arrears building up for technical reasons during the set up phase, these were mostly ironed out once payment arrangements with local authority and/or DWP were established. Overall, arrears for the HF4Y cohort were 5% - higher than the whole organisation (2.64%), but lower than the comparison group (7%).
- The responsive (and potentially rechargeable<sup>1</sup>) repairs bill is around two to three times higher for the HF4Y cohort, than for the non-HF4Y comparison group. However, this was in some part due to higher surveillance and repairs being carried out earlier.
- Apart from in one case, HF4Y tenancies have been sustained and/or moves between tenancies managed. There were fewer void losses and no legal costs for the HF4Y cohort compared to the non-HF4Y cohort. This suggests a strong invest-to-save argument for housing providers as well as for wider systems.

### Replicability considerations

AHA attributes the success of its involvement in HF4Y to a number of critical success factors – each of which would need to be considered by potential new providers of HF4Y:

- The calibre and commitment of the support provider to minimise risks in the future of tenancies that needed ongoing support; effective partnership working and understanding of the differences between 'housing' and 'support' and acceptance of some blurring of roles where accompanied by ongoing reflection;

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<sup>1</sup> Where repairs are classed as rechargeable, they have been deemed to be the fault of the tenant.

- The vision and passion of staff and managers within AHA to develop an effective housing and support offer for young care leavers; and
- The fit with its own stock, size, financial position and values. In particular the availability of flats in dispersed locations (not next to each other); and also opportunities to link to community development work and place-shaping strategies.

### **How much HF4Y might Scotland's care leavers need?**

Children's Social Work statistics for Scotland suggest that just over 1.8K young people left local authority care in 2019/20, whilst around 6.5K were eligible for aftercare services in that year. However, only a very small minority of these young people will need a HF4Y offer. It is broadly estimated that around 100 young people exiting the care system each year in Scotland might be suitable for a HF4Y offer. There are around 160 housing associations in Scotland, and most local authorities still own significant stock, so this feels like a manageable in-flow if reliable funding for high quality wrap-around support is available.

### **Tips to other housing providers considering HF4Y**

*"Give it a go. It's the right thing to do." (Chair of Almond's Board)*

- Expect quite a bit of upfront work: the groundwork is critical, but it will taper off considerably over time.
- However, people's journeys will not necessarily be linear – you must expect and plan for lapses, crises and set-backs.
- There are financial risks and ethical implications from deciding to spend some of the organisation's reserves on buying furniture for a relatively small number of individuals, and in departing from the allocations policy, so it is important to 'go in with eyes open' and really weigh this up.
- Do it at the right pace and scale for the size and financial position of your organisation.
- There is no half way step – you are either all in or not; it would be more damaging to offer this for a while and then withdraw than not to do it at all.
- Do it with trusted partners, commissioners/ funders
- Record staff input and other data (what you spend on furniture, hidden costs) clearly and consistently from the output, so as to more accurately monitor and track progress – 'wish we had done this from the start'.
- Keep staff across the organisation and the Board updated on the initiative: wide understanding and buy-in is key to success, and also allows for benefits to ripple out.

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. The Rock Trust/ Almond Housing Association Housing First for Youth Project

Since 2017, Almond Housing Association (abbreviated to ‘Almond’ throughout this report) has been working in partnership with support provider, Rock Trust to deliver Housing First for Youth (HF4Y) in West Lothian, Scotland. Initial beneficiaries of the project were care experienced young people with multiple and complex needs, who were already homeless or deemed to be at high risk of homelessness, though the focus has been broadened since the first pilot to include young people who have not been in local authority care. From September 2017 to January 2022, a total of 17 young people have accessed the service; 10 of whom have become tenants of Almond as a result of the project; with the remainder accessing properties owned and managed by West Lothian council.

The initial three-year pilot was funded by Nationwide Building Society and Housing First Europe Hub, with significant in-kind contributions from both Almond and Rock Trust. Continuation funding has been supplied by West Lothian Council. The original pilot was evaluated by [Imogen Blood & Associates](#) (IBA), in partnership with the [Centre for Housing Policy at the University of York](#), and with funding from Housing First Europe Hub. The evaluation report was published in 2020 and can be downloaded from [here](#).

### 1.2. The purpose and structure of this report

Having witnessed the success of the Rock Trust pilot and having a desire to expand the offer as part of their mission, Almond commissioned IBA to carry out research to explore its contribution to HF4Y principles from their perspective as a housing provider. Almond also wish to use the findings to share wider learning across the sector with a focus on the journey they took to make the project work and to provide useful guidance for other housing providers to use, test and develop.

Having summarised our methods in the next section, the remainder of this report is divided into the following sections:

- **Section 2** describes recent developments in Housing First for Youth (HF4Y) and summarises key messages from existing literature (including our previous evaluation of this project) regarding the key role of housing within the model.
- **Section 3** tells Almond’s story – its decision to participate in the HF4Y pilot, how it implemented the pilot and the critical success factors within this.
- **Section 4** presents two composite case studies in which we have merged details from different tenancies to present two different journeys, highlighting the role of the housing officer within these.
- **Section 5** highlights the impacts from the HF4Y project for Almond, both internally and externally.
- **Section 6** summarises the financial implications of the project for Almond.
- **Section 7** reflects on the potential for and possible demand for replication of the model by other social landlords.

### 1.3. Our methods

This research was conducted between June and December 2021 and included the following:

#### **Desk based research phase**

- Review of secondary data from the Rock Trust Pilot and outcomes of the evaluation.
- A targeted review of relevant evidence, including:
  - Searches for and within existing research and guidance on HF4Y and Housing First for findings relating to the role of housing providers;
  - Statistics and policy documents describing the cohort size, needs and strategic context in relation to care leavers with complex needs, who may be at risk of homelessness in Scotland.
- Review of data held by Almond on HF4Y, including tenancy management information, overall budgeting and operating costs, timesheets submitted by the dedicated HO which provide a detailed account of the day to day running of the pilot, and a comparison of the costs associated with HF4Y and non-HF4Y tenancies occupied by younger tenants.

#### **Primary data collection phase**

##### **Interviews with 8 key informants from Almond**

The purpose of the interviews and group discussions was to gain a deeper understanding of why and how the pilot was run; the motivations, perceived risks, and resources contributed, as well as details on how the project was established and the relationships developed.

We conducted individual interviews with the Housing Support Manager, two Housing Officers, Housing Manager and Chair of the Board of Trustees from Almond. We conducted a small group discussion with another three members of the Almond Board, and a further Board member made a written contribution.

##### **Survey**

A short survey was circulated to all Almond staff in order to gain an understanding of awareness and perceptions of the HF4Y project, and any impacts on Almond at an organisational level. A total of 20 responses were received, of which 9 were based in Housing Management, 4 Asset Management, 3 in Corporate Services and 4 ICT/Finance.

##### **Case studies**

Two composite case studies (narrative, with supplementary visual tool) were produced by collating existing data and information collected through the current research – ensuring as close a match of contextual variables as possible.

## 2. Housing First for Youth and the role of Housing within it

### 2.1. Housing First for Youth (HF4Y): recent developments

HF4Y is “designed to address the needs of developing adolescents and young adults by providing them with rapid access to housing that’s safe, affordable, appropriate and without pre-conditions, combining this with necessary and age-appropriate supports that focus on health, well-being, life skills, engagement in education and employment, as well as social inclusion”<sup>2</sup>.

Housing First is now well-established as a model/ approach in the UK, Europe and internationally to address chronic homelessness with people who have multiple and complex needs<sup>3</sup>. Over the last few years, policy makers and academics alike have increasingly debated the merits of extending and/or adapting Housing First for other groups of people experiencing homelessness such as women<sup>4</sup> and young people, including care leavers.

The Rock Trust/ Almond HF4Y project was the first known model to be set up for care leavers in the UK in 2017. This was influenced by international developments, most particularly by Canada that first proposed a specific HF4Y model and detailed guidance<sup>5</sup> as part of their programme to address youth homelessness. Since then, Canada has established large-scale models of HF4Y alongside a detailed evaluation programme<sup>6</sup>.

Housing First for Youth is also developing at the European level and within the UK. The Housing First Europe Hub published its own guidance on delivering Housing First for Youth in Europe in 2019<sup>7</sup>, and collects resources on: <https://housingfirsteurope.eu/housing-first-for-youth/>. The Hub also operates an established HF4Y network<sup>8</sup>, that includes an active Community of Practice where approaches are debated across Europe.

Similarly, in the UK, there is growing interest in the Housing First model for young people; for example a HF4Y programme has recently been established in Wales<sup>9</sup>. Most recently, the first evaluation of a Housing First for Youth project in England was published, looking at the

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<sup>2</sup> p.3, Housing First Europe Hu (2021) An Introduction to Housing First for Youth (HF4Y), <https://housingfirsteurope.eu/assets/files/2021/07/HousingFirst4YouthFinalPrint.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> All Party Parliamentary Group for Ending Homelessness (2021) It’s like a dream come true: An enquiry into scaling up Housing First, London: APPG for Ending Homelessness, <https://www.crisis.org.uk/media/245348/appg-housing-first-report-2021.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> Quilgars, D. and Pleace, N. (2018) *The Threshold Housing First Pilot for Women with an Offending History: The First Two Years* York: University of York.

<sup>5</sup> Gaetz, S. (2017) *THIS is Housing First for Youth: A Program Model Guide*, Toronto: Canadian Observatory on Homelessness Press.

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.homelesshub.ca/HF4Y>

<sup>7</sup> Gaetz, Stephen. (2019). *THIS is Housing First for Youth: Europe. A Program Model Guide*. Toronto: Canadian Observatory on Homelessness Press.

<sup>8</sup> <https://housingfirsteurope.eu/blog/join-our-hf4y-community-of-practice/>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.cymorthcymru.org.uk/en/news-blog/news/housing-first-youth-principles>

experience of the Centrepont/ Haringey Housing First project for care leavers. The main finding was a 70-80% tenancy sustainment rate but with significant difficulties in the allocation of housing via local authority housing stock in London.

In summary, Housing First for Youth remains in its relatively early development but with some consolidation since the Rock Trust/ Almond project was established in 2017. This report is therefore timely in providing more information on how to potentially scale up the model across the UK, and potentially Europe too.

## 2.2. The role of housing in HF4Y

The role of housing in Housing First for Youth (HF4Y) is, as the title of the model suggests, critical. However, there is limited evidence regarding the roles, motivations and experiences of housing providers involved in HF4Y, though there have been at least two recent publications exploring social landlords' perspectives in relation to the wider Housing First model:

- A small study of how 8 English housing associations are using the Housing First (for adults) model undertaken by National Housing Federation in 2020<sup>10</sup>.
- A Homeless Link briefing<sup>11</sup> (and accompanying guidance<sup>12</sup>) published in 2020 which explores the relationship between social landlords and Housing First services in England.

As the European Program Model Guide points out:

*“The goal of HF4Y is not simply to provide housing stability, but to support young people as youth and facilitate a healthy transition to adulthood”<sup>13</sup>.*

HF4Y recognises that good quality, affordable housing is a necessary foundation for a successful transition to adulthood, particularly for care experienced young people who have multiple and complex needs. This group have often experienced trauma, loss and disadvantage; and may have felt limited choice and control within a series of past 'placements'. For example, in our earlier evaluation of the Rock Trust/ Almond HF4Y project, one young person described how they had previously been 'passed around like a piece of paper'. There is a particular risk that eviction, or the withdrawal of support (whether actual or threatened) may re-traumatise.

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<sup>10</sup> National Housing Federation, Experiences of housing associations delivering Housing First, Dec. 2020.

<sup>11</sup> Homeless Link, Briefing: Exploring the relationship between social landlords and Housing First services, July 2020.

<sup>12</sup> See: <https://hfe.homeless.org.uk/housing-providers>

<sup>13</sup> p1. This is Housing First for Youth Europe at: <https://housingfirsteurope.eu/assets/files/2020/05/HF4Y-Full-V5.pdf>

A Way Home, Scotland's Youth Homelessness Prevention Pathway<sup>14</sup>, argues that many supported housing options for this cohort are temporary; yet:

*"These are young people who require access to services which are designed to meet their particular need for stability, rather than experience further instability". (p.15)*

Good housing provides a roof over a young person's head, preventing homelessness and the negative outcomes associated with it, especially for those who have few – if any – other suitable housing options. However, there is also evidence from the Rock Trust/ Almond project and from the wider evidence base that the type of housing that is provided, the way it is provided and the ongoing role of the housing manager can further help to 'facilitate the healthy transition to adulthood'.

In our earlier evaluation of the Rock Trust/ Almond project, young people told us how much they valued:

- **Safety and security:** young people told us that they particularly valued the permanence of having their own secure tenancy and how this had helped them to feel more settled. Some explained that they no longer felt the need to run away as they had in the past.
- **Choice and control is central to the HF4Y principles:** young people told us how they had been able to choose whether or not to take on a particular property; how to furnish and decorate their home; some had been supported to move to a new property when their needs had changed, or where they had decided they were not happy in a previous property.
- **Quality and personalisation of property:** young people were struck by the size and quality of the property they had been offered, and some described feeling lucky in this regard, compared to others of their age. They also particularly valued being able to choose furnishings and being supported to decorate their property so that it reflected their personality and felt like home.
- **Freedom and responsibility of their own tenancy:** most of those we interviewed reflected on how they had matured into their responsibilities as a tenant. Almost all described being 'wild' at first - throwing parties and inviting friends around - but most then described 'settling down'. One young person told us they regretted having 'ruined' the house they had worked hard to decorate; another greatly valued getting a dog, which they had not been free to do prior to getting an independent tenancy.
- **Proactive and empathetic housing management:** the young people's primary relationships were clearly with their support worker from Rock Trust; however, all of those we interviewed knew their named Housing Officer, understood their role and how this complemented that of their support worker. Compared to the

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<sup>14</sup> A Way Home Scotland/ The Scottish Government/ CELCIS (2019) Youth Homelessness Prevention Pathway: Improving Care Leavers' Housing Pathways at <https://www.rocktrust.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/Youth-Homelessness-Prevention-Pathway-Care-Leavers.pdf>

unconditional relationship which the young people described with their support worker (described as almost being a 'friendship'), the relationship with the Housing Officer could be quite tense at times and flashpoints were reported where there had been challenges in some of these tenancies (perhaps more akin to a parental relationship). Nevertheless, both the housing officer and the young people seem to have developed a clearer appreciation of each other's position and were described by each other as having learned to change and communicate more effectively with each other over time.

In the next section, we tell the story of Almond's involvement in HF4Y, and consider the steps taken both to provide high quality accommodation and to support positive youth development within the project.

### 3. Delivering HF4Y: Almond's story

This section explores why Almond became involved in HF4Y and how they contributed to the design and running of the pilot.

#### 3.1. Background to Almond

Set up in 1994, Almond is the largest mainstream provider of social housing in West Lothian. It manages a total of 2514 properties, of which 806 are flats (124 = 1 bed and 627 = 2 bed). Most of the properties are located in the Craigshill, Elburn, Howden, Ladywell, Deans and Carmondean areas of Livingston, as well as in the town of Whitburn, with limited stock in Armadale, Bathgate and Mid Calder. Almond also works with West Lothian Council and The Scottish Government to provide new build homes for rent in the West Lothian area. Craigshill is consistently recognised as an area of high deprivation in terms of income, education, employment and health.



Map of West Lothian, from [West Lothian Council's web site](#)

Almond currently employs 43 members of staff. The Chief Executive is supported by four Directors of Service (across Asset Management, Housing Management, Corporate Services, Finance and ICT) and it is governed by 13 voluntary Board members. The housing management team consists of a Head of Service, Housing Support Manager (who manages 6 Housing Support Assistants and the HF4Y Housing Officer) and Housing Manager (who lines manages 7 Housing Officers and the Debt Recovery Officer).

Almond has a shared waiting list with the council and other social landlords in the area, via the West Lothian Housing Register. Applicants aged 16 years and over can apply; properties

are allocated according to a points-based system which assesses and prioritises applicants, according to their level of housing need<sup>15</sup>.

Almond describes its financial performance as ‘strong’ and its approach to risk as ‘measured’. Details of its financial position are published within the organisation’s [Strategic Plan 2020 – 2023](#).

### 3.2. Deciding to participate in HF4Y

Overall, incorporating an approach such as HF4Y within Almond did not come naturally – with Almond described as a ‘traditional housing association’ – with a focus on rigorously pursuing rent arrears<sup>16</sup>. Though there was recognition of the need for holistic support, with development of the existing Housing Support Manager’s role to cover support – the prevailing culture meant this was not necessarily easy to incorporate.

Nevertheless, staff across operational and strategic functions and the Board described HF4Y as ‘the right thing to do’, given a number of different factors:

#### **The association’s overall financial security**

The fact that Almond assessed that they had sufficient reserves and capacity within a well-run housing management service was felt to be a necessary, if not sufficient condition for participation in HF4Y.

#### **Alignment with Almond values**

Though there is no legal duty for Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) in Scotland to offer accommodation to care leavers, staff and trustees referred to the wider role of housing providers that is rooted in responding to the needs of the local community, which should include the provision of housing to those who are falling through housing gaps. Additionally, the Board acknowledged wider policy related factors in which there is increasing pressure on RSLs to offer more properties to people affected by homelessness - and viewed that the provision within a HF model is well suited to supporting this cohort.

#### **A partner that is trusted and invested**

The case for testing the HF concept was strengthened due to the intended partner. Rock Trust already offered a well-established support service for young people in the local area and was trusted across operational and strategic staff. The Housing Support Manager had also already established a positive relationship with Rock Trust’s local manager and recognised his passion and commitment to supporting care leavers and applying the principles of HF. This – along with the fact that Rock Trust were also financially invested in the pilot - were key factors in positively influencing the SMT and Board approval processes.

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<sup>15</sup> See Almond’s [Allocations Policy](#) for more information.

<sup>16</sup> NB: According to the [Scottish Housing Regulator](#), Almond collected 100.5% of the total rent it was due in the year 2020/21, compared to the Scottish average of 99.1%.

### **Leadership and passion of key staff**

The Almond Housing Support Manager was keen to support the pilot - identifying that there was no effective service in the local area for some care leavers. Through this, the Housing Support Manager worked closely and persistently with the Senior Management Team (SMT) to demonstrate why Almond should take a risk and how this could be achieved and also enthused the Board who wished to encourage and nurture this passion. Through this, the Board identified the potential benefits of being involved in the pilot to boost staff development, morale and wellbeing.

### **The right 'place-based' setting**

As a housing provider situated in a specific geographical location, Almond was viewed by the Board as being well suited to supporting an effective HF approach from a strategic and operational standpoint. In strategic terms it offered opportunities to embed a place-based preventative intervention which would benefit the whole community in the long run through supporting care leavers to find stability and support the opportunity to integrate. Operationally, patch-based housing officers were viewed as well-placed to build relationships in an extension of their community role.

### **Breaking new ground**

Of particular interest to the SMT, HF4Y was promoted as something that had not been done previously in Scotland at that time. It was also presented as offering a more preventative approach compared to traditional HF - which tends to work with people who have already experienced entrenched homelessness (evidence shows that many entrenched homeless people are care experienced).

### **Compromise and management of risk**

At the outset, the view was that providing a Scottish Secure Tenancy to a young care leaver with indicators of complex needs, with no requirement to engage with support, was undoubtedly a risk for a housing provider – particularly where no duty was owed. This meant that a strong case needed to be put forward for the project to be approved, alongside a willingness to compromise where necessary whilst balancing the need to ensure fidelity to the principles of HF. The pilot initially offered a Short Scottish Secure Tenancy – as this was required to gain approval from SMT – though this was changed to a secure tenancy soon after due to acknowledging that a limited tenancy went against HF principles.

## **3.3. Running the pilot**

A number of factors were key to the running of the pilot:

### ***Contribution to resource***

Almond supported the pilot through the following:

- Offer of one- and two-bedroom flats – initially set at 5 and then increased to 10 once Almond and Rock Trust had developed and cemented their partnership.



*Almond flats*

- £30k in funding - this constituted just under one fifth of funding across the pilot (17.64%) (other contributions included: Rock Trust £50K, Housing First Europe Hub £40k and Nationwide Building Society £50k). The funding mainly supported a furniture allowance and staff time - including:
  - Housing Support Manager (2 hours per month plus ad hoc support, 1-5% of full-time equivalent post);
  - One dedicated housing officer (initially set at 5% of FTE post. Note that this additional allocation was removed after the project had been running for about a year – as it was viewed by the HO as no longer required).

### ***Single Dedicated Housing Officer (HO)***

Almond felt that the best approach to supporting the pilot was to identify a dedicated HO who would be trained up and mentored to support all HF4Y tenants, including where young people were placed on a different officer's patch. At the outset, the HO's patch size was adjusted down to allow for any additional time that would be required as part of working on the HF4Y pilot. The HO manager recognised that time was more resource intensive at the beginning, particularly around initial technical issues and setting out parameters with the support provider, though this settled down once the pilot (and HF4Y tenancies) bedded in. As the project developed, the dedicated officer also introduced a 'buddy' HO to the HF4Y project in order to provide cover, reflecting Almond's wider practice of pairing HOs so they can cover each other's workload where needed.

While some staff and trustee interviewees felt Almond's single HO model was positive in that it provided consistency for HF4Y tenants, a few issues arose where young people could not be placed in the area covered by the dedicated HO. This necessitated information sharing and effective joint working between the patch officer and the HF4Y officer:

*"I am used to being accountable to tenants on my patch, so if there are complaints...I need to pass this on [to the HF4Y HO] – it is less of a smooth process"*

There were some suggestions as to how this could be improved, such as routinely sharing information – both about the HF4Y scheme as a whole and about individual tenancies – with the wider HO team.

### **Staff development and management**

Staff skills, style and management were assessed as being key to the success of the project. The dedicated HO was selected because it was felt they had the right qualities:

*“I think you need the right personality to do this job – you need values, passion, that’s why I approached [HF4Y HO] to do the job. In her I saw a spark, enthusiasm, a commitment to working with young people – which is important to run this.”*

(Housing Support Manager)

The HO continued to be line managed by the HO Manager, with the Housing Support Manager supervising their work in relation to the HF4Y project. The HO Manager was highly supportive of the pilot and could draw on experience from a similar project in a previous role. They have a good working relationship with the Housing Support Manager, to whom they provided cover, advice and support in relation to the project.

Training and mentoring were also important:

- **Training:** The HO was trained through FEANTSA to work in a trauma informed way. This was described as a new way of working within housing management and one which also lead to changes in the way the HO approached their general role.

#### ***What do we mean by ‘trauma-informed’ ways of working?***

People have often been penalised by services for behaviours that result from prior trauma and their own best efforts to feel physically, emotionally, and relationally safe.

By contrast, **trauma-informed** approaches:

- Seek to understand which social or environmental triggers might re-traumatise
- Work with people to understand what would help them to feel physically, emotionally and relationally safe within services and beyond.
- Plan and act to change practice, the physical environment and the way systems operate so as to improve feelings of trust and safety, and anticipate/ reduce triggers.

### **Working with the support provider**

The relationship with the support provider cemented as the pilot developed through what both parties described as a learning curve around the most effective ways of working together to respond to support and tenancy related issues. Regular meetings and light touch contact allowed relationships to grow during the early stages of the pilot, but were held much less frequently once roles and ways of working had been established.

### **3.4. Success factors**

Based on interviews with staff across Rock Trust, Almond and young people themselves<sup>17</sup>, Almond contributed to the success of the pilot through provision of resources, but also through being invested in supporting positive change for vulnerable young people.

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<sup>17</sup> Interviews with young people themselves from the [earlier evaluation](#).

The following table summarises the main ways in which Almond contributed to the pilot's success in delivering the aspects of housing which young people told us they valued (as described in section 2.2). The column describing Almond's practice also incorporates feedback from the support provider and other professionals such as social workers who were interviewed in our original evaluation of the pilot.

| <b>What young people valued about housing</b>                                              | <b>How Almond practice contributed to this</b>                                                                                                               |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>High quality accommodation</b>                                                          |                                                                                                                                                              |
| Security of permanent home                                                                 | Secure tenancy, sustained by proactive housing management to de-escalate problems                                                                            |
| Having some choice over property                                                           | Visits to inform decisions, but also reflections on whether more choice could be offered in future                                                           |
| Choice & control: furnishings & decor<br>Sense of ownership and pride                      | Personal choice via a personalisation budget which Rock Trust could help the young person spend                                                              |
| Quality of property and furnishings                                                        | Quality properties <sup>18</sup> ; generous furnishing budget<br>Speed of response to repairs                                                                |
| <b>Supporting Positive Youth Development</b>                                               |                                                                                                                                                              |
| Support to manage freedom versus responsibility of own tenancy                             | Empathetic/ trauma-informed housing management<br>Almond received information on tenants' backgrounds<br>Honesty, challenge and strategies to manage tenancy |
| Primary relationships with Rock Trust<br>Clarity & consistency over HO role alongside this | Regular meetings with Rock Trust to communicate and define respective roles<br>Consistent HO with sufficient time on project                                 |

As reported elsewhere, there were some tensions around the HF boundaries – with the HO acknowledging that at times this became blurred – with some reluctance to take enforcement action due to having an awareness of the struggles HF4Y tenants had experienced. Though this does not impact on the fidelity of HF4Y – it meant the HO took on additional tasks outside of the scope of her role at the outset. The HO adapted this through working closely with, and more effectively delegating tasks to the support provider. In some cases, this involved staff at Almond offering suggestions to the provider – who took feedback on board and acted on it.

The support provider did not view Almond as merely 'a housing provider' but as instrumental to building an effective HF4Y model that worked, with examples provided of being open with each other and sharing learning at an operational and strategic level. Almond key staff not only attended key meetings, but also promoted the pilot widely through attending talks and raising awareness across other housing providers.

<sup>18</sup> NB: According to the Scottish Housing Regulator, in 2021/22, 96.5% of Almond's homes met the Scottish Housing Quality Standard compared to the Scottish average of 87.0%.

## 4. Case studies

To highlight the ways in which HF4Y worked from an operational perspective, we have produced two composite studies. These are based on information collated across the nine HF4Y tenancies and told from a housing management perspective. Each case study offers a narrative description, followed by a visual representation of the tenancy journey. The case studies should not be viewed as ‘typical’ experiences – but rather, as indicative of the ways in which the HF4Y pilot impacted on the day-to-day HO role. The case studies describe a relatively smooth and then a rockier journey respectively - which reflects the reality that some young people will experience challenges along the way, as we would expect for all those who live with multiple and complex need. The case studies demonstrate how the HO developed their role to successfully blend a trauma informed approach that concentrates on being solution focused and strength based.

### 4.1. Case study 1: Carly<sup>19</sup>

Carly, a 17-year-old care leaver, signed up to her Almond tenancy early September 2018. Angela, the Housing Officer, with Carly’s permission, was provided with detailed information about Carly’s background, including a history of self-harm, running away from home and limited family support. As this was Carly’s first tenancy, Angela ensured that she minimised potential issues around noise and carried out the sign up after the weekend.

Through a Leaving Care Grant and additional funding provided through Almond, Carly chose her own furniture prior to moving in, visiting IKEA with the HF support provider. Angela felt this set the tenancy off to a good start, helping Carly to make her flat feel like a home.

When Carly first moved in, Angela met with the HF support providers weekly, in addition to light touch catch ups. The meetings were used as an opportunity to keep up to date with all HF tenants and offered a convenient way for Angela to pass on information about any issues or potential ongoing support Carly might need.

Within the first few weeks of the tenancy starting, the HO received a noise complaint from a neighbour. Though this was logged at a meeting with the support provider, Angela popped around to inform Carly of the potential consequences of breaching her tenancy, as well as offering practical advice and suggestions to de-escalate the situation:

After receiving a few more neighbour complaints across the first few months of the tenancy, Angela learned through the support provider that Carly was struggling with visitors due to peer pressure. The HO worked with Carly to set up some ground rules and provided her with a letter from a solicitor, which was laminated and which Carly chose to put up on her wall, so it was visible to her friends. This approach worked well, and Angela has since repeated the exercise successfully with a non-HF young tenant.

Through being provided with detailed information about Carly’s difficult traumatic childhood, attending trauma informed training and working closely with the support provider, Angela appreciated that it would take a little time for Carly to settle down. Angela

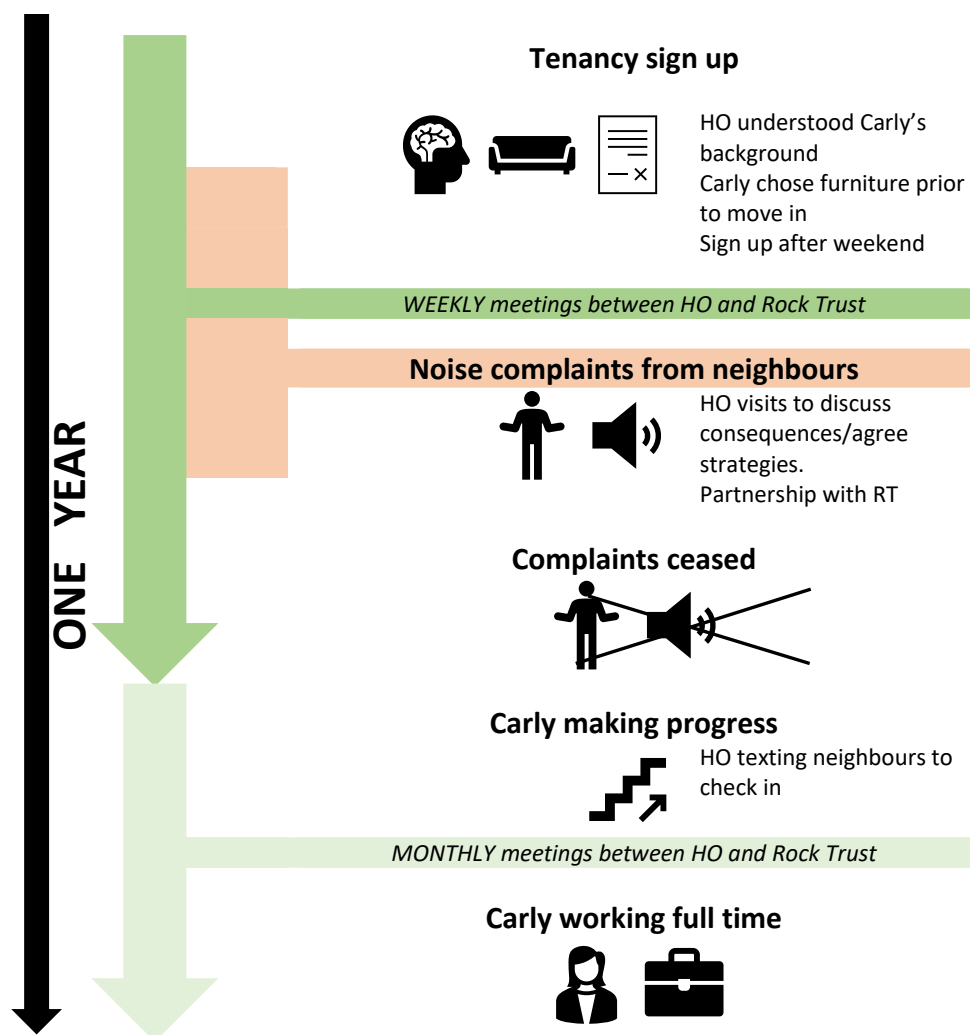
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<sup>19</sup> All names used in the case studies (young people and staff) are pseudonyms

viewed that approaching breaches in a more solution focused way was beneficial to Carly's tenancy sustainment and development, and through de-escalating the situation, also improved neighbour relations and reduced complaints. In the meantime, Angela continued to be kept up to speed on how the support provider was working with Carly to support her employment and wellbeing needs (e.g., helping her create a CV, accompanying her to a local exercise class).

As the tenancy progressed and the complaints ceased, the meetings between the HO and support provider dropped to once a month, with light touch contact continuing where needed. Angela also texted neighbours from time to time after a weekend to make sure everything was okay.

After a period of a year, Carly started working full time and learning to drive. Angela felt this was achieved as she was given the space to learn from mistakes – yet supported to understand the consequences of ASB delivered in a more person-centred way, rather than through written, formal warnings.



#### 4.2. Case study 2: Mark

Mark signed up to a secure tenancy with Almond in May 2019; he accepted the property due to liking the area and feeling he could settle there. Mark picked out paint colours and furniture with his support provider prior to moving in. The HO, Angela attended a move-in house inspection, and then met up with the support provider to discuss how it went – information was then shared via weekly catch ups.

Angela had knowledge of Mark's background through information provided by the Leaving Care team with Mark's consent, which highlighted a history of social anxiety, self-harm, substance misuse and offending behaviour.

Mark asked for the rent to be paid direct from his benefits. The support provider worked with Mark to resolve initial delays in sorting out his Universal Credit, keeping Angela up to date. This meant she was able to liaise with finance to ensure that rent arrears were not progressed.

As Angela had been informed that Mark experienced social anxiety, she was aware that he struggled to get outside, so she sometimes "popped in" if she was passing by. On one occasion, she found that he was in crisis and had no money for food or phone credit. Angela was able to get in touch with the support provider, and they worked together to help Mark. Angela also took steps to encourage Mark to get out in the local community – suggesting he took his dog out for a walk to get some fresh air. Though Mark did not feel ready to do this alone, he did get outside with his support provider.

Through occasionally visiting Mark and receiving updates from the support provider, Angela was able to keep an eye on any property damage. With reference to a damaged internal door – Angela presented Mark with a choice about how to approach it, whilst helping him to understand the consequences of any decision that he made. She explained that he would need to pay for deliberate damage if he moves out, but that how he keeps the property is up to him whilst he lives there. He decided to pay for a new door through his benefits that are being paid direct to Almond.

Over time, Angela built up a trusting relationship with Mark, and though there were ongoing issues around property damage and neighbour complaints, Angela kept on top of these through liaising with the support provider – and continuing to have open discussions with Mark. She described this as sometimes akin to a parenting role, being both challenging and supportive.

When Mark identified any needs during Angela's visits, this information was shared with the support provider to ensure he did not need to explain his situation again. Angela also kept in light touch contact with neighbours to keep a record of any complaints, which were then passed on to the support provider.

Around four months into the tenancy, Angela attended a multi-agency case conference, as did the support provider and Mark. This made a positive difference as ASB complaints reduced from once or twice weekly to a monthly occurrence. He also started to take out

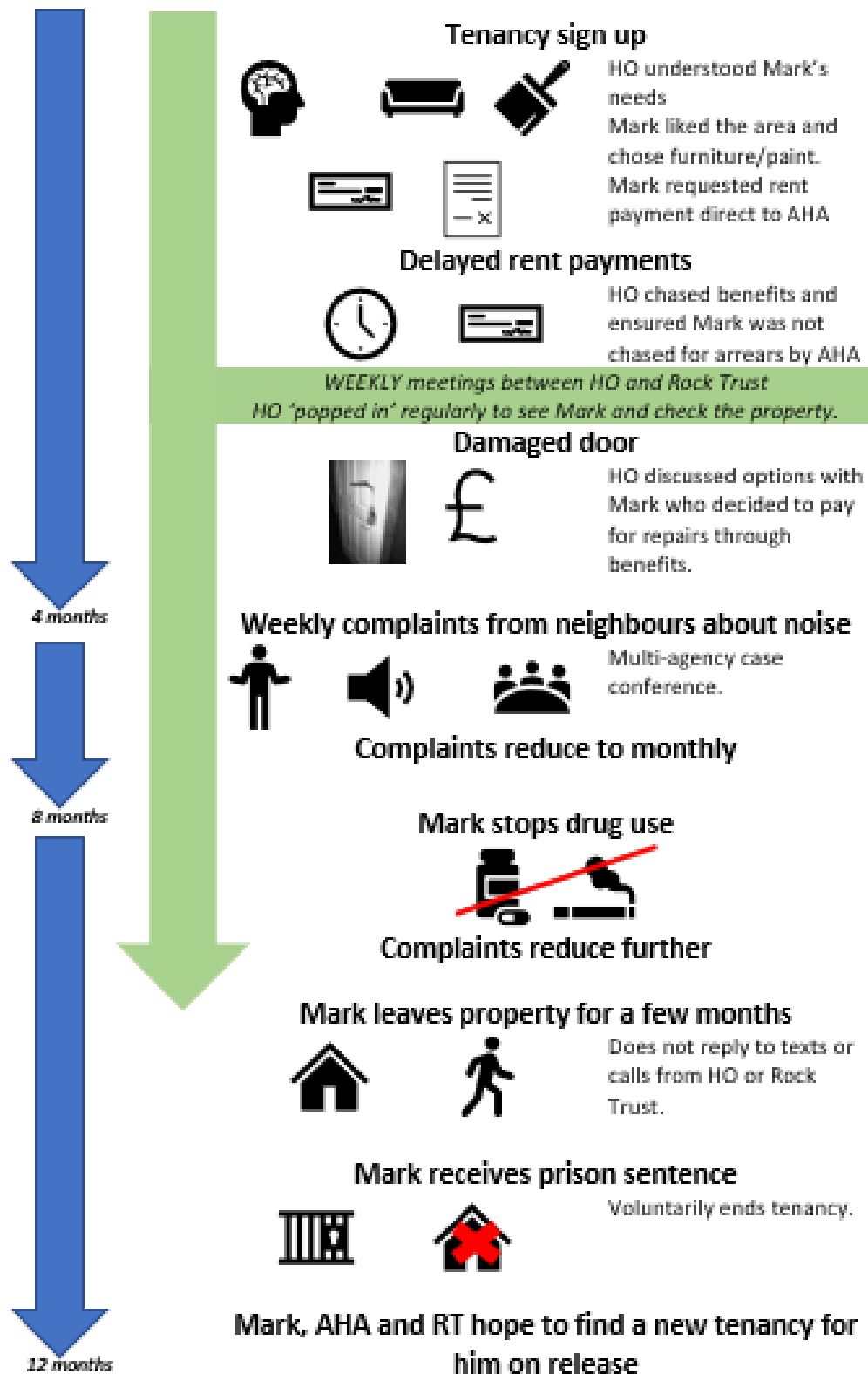
the rubbish and do more practical things. When Angela was away, a colleague was described as adopting a similar approach.

Angela acknowledged that, at times, the separation between her housing management and more supportive role became blurred - but she felt that this contributed to helping Mark retain the tenancy - through identifying issues before they escalated too far – and explaining potential consequences where necessary. The trauma informed training helped Angela to step back and be more mindful of the impact of the trauma that Mark had experienced, and how this might negatively affect his behaviour as a tenant, helping her to adopt a more holistic focus. Angela referred to a few non-HF young tenants with similar tenancy related issues, and though she tried to support them, this was hindered due to having less awareness of their background or any existing support network.

Throughout the tenancy, the support provider worked with Mark around his mental health and substance misuse issues. After being in the tenancy for around eight months, Mark stopped taking drugs. This was reassuring to Angela from a safeguarding and tenancy sustainment perspective.

Though complaints around ASB continued across the tenancy, these lessened over time, and Angela felt satisfied that she could be less “hands on” after the first six months, either passing on any issues at monthly team meetings, or phoning with more immediate concerns.

On a couple of occasions, Mark has left his accommodation for a few months at a time and during these periods did not respond to communication from the provider or Angela. After around a year, Mark voluntarily terminated his tenancy, and went into prison shortly after this. Angela explained how she corresponded via email to reassure him that Almond will look to accommodate again when he is released. Though the support provider remains involved, Angela felt it was important to offer a level of “stickability” through Almond as a housing provider, where possible.



## 5. Impacts for Almond

Staff and Board members at Almond identified a number of positive impacts for the housing association resulting from its involvement in the HF4Y project, both in relation to organisational change and external reputation and influence. We considered the impacts of the initiatives on the young people, the support provider and on statutory services in detail in our [earlier evaluation](#).

### 5.1. Organisational impacts

#### Peer influence leading to a ripple effect

Though it is beyond the scope of this research to provide detailed commentary on how HF4Y has impacted the wider working practices of Housing Officers, we heard that some are now generally more receptive to taking on younger tenants, where previously the risks were felt to be too high.

Almond key staff provided examples of where learning gained through the HF4Y pilot was being cascaded across the wider HO team, meaning that some HOs now felt more confident accommodating younger tenants, and exploring issues beyond the tenancy. This was being achieved as a result of learning from a peer (the dedicated HO), who is described as popular and respected amongst colleagues:

*“[we] needed someone on the inside to generate that cultural change. Feel that other HOs can now pick up on HF themselves – it used to be that HOs didn’t want to house YP – now they are willing to, they ask about the support that is in place and the organisations that they can link in to, ‘it is night and day’”*  
(Housing Support Manager)

As highlighted elsewhere in this report, the HO provided examples of successfully applying HF principles and practice to other tenants, including people with multiple and complex needs outside of the pilot:

*“It’s a virtuous circle – makes you realise this is what we should be doing for all tenants – this leads to better outcomes for all our tenants”.*

Practical examples of this included:

- Speaking to the tenant before sending an enforcement letter (and realising that the letter alone may make things worse);
- Working with young tenants to develop a behaviour contract:

*“We both sign it – I laminate it – they use it to tell their friends what they can do – it takes [the pressure] away from them...it looks professional – if it stops one party I am happy to do it” (HO)*

The HO cascades this information and discusses her approach with colleagues.

### **Introducing a Trauma informed approach to other housing staff**

Initially, the key Almond staff involved in HF4Y attended trauma informed training – which has since been rolled out and offered to all HO staff. Though this development has also been driven by the wider ambition of the Scottish Government in relation to trauma-informed practice<sup>20</sup> – the successful implementation of the HF4Y pilot has also assisted take-up and implementation of the training.

Feedback from one staff member interviewed was positive, with trauma informed training viewed as a useful tool for “battle hardened” staff to step back and consider the backgrounds and experiences of some of their tenants:

*“There was a tenant with a hole in ceiling – they had put the hole in to tie rope to commit suicide. Offering to seal it up helped the tenant move on with their life...my trauma informed training made me realise this impact on recovery. HOs who have done the role for a long time may not have seen this as a solution, just see it as ‘a hole in the ceiling’ – it is more of a holistic focus. People aren’t bad...for not realising this – the HO brain protect themselves”.*

It is important to note that not all who attended the training reported a positive experience, with one perceiving it as “*pushing an ideology*”. This may have been because the training was presented as compulsory – or “*a three-line whip*”, as one HO put it. However, the interviewee agreed with the principles contained within the training; their comments instead suggest the importance of making sure that trauma-informed training for housing officers is role specific.

### **A more inclusive and place-based approach**

Identifying housing blockages experienced by the young people within Rock Trust services has encouraged Almond to look outwards and explore similar challenges facing other groups. Working with supported housing providers such as Women’s Aid and Open Door, Almond has introduced a policy to allow direct referrals to be made for those who need to move on from supported tenancies or other services. This development is reported as being due to the learning captured from being involved in HF4Y.

As part of the housing association’s strategic focus on place-based development, a new Almond Community Engagement Officer now works in partnership with a range of groups and agencies to provide improved or additional services in areas where Almond has properties – working with both tenants and non-tenants alike. This initiative has in turn benefitted HF4Y tenants, who have been able to access reconditioned laptops distributed by the Community Engagement Officer.

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<sup>20</sup> Through the [National Trauma Training Programme \(NTP\)](#), the shared ambition of the Scottish Government, COSLA, NHS and partners is to develop a trauma-informed and trauma-responsive workforce across Scotland.

## 5.2. External facing impacts

### **Raising the profile of Almond**

There was agreement across the Board, as well as key staff and wider stakeholders that Almond's involvement in the pilot had raised the organisation's profile across: the local community, regulators and Government, with other housing providers and at an international level. The success of the housing related element of the pilot reached Finland, the pioneers of the HF principles.

*"The pioneers came to visit us..... including the Finnish government ... to learn from us – they did HF – but hadn't done it for HF4Y".*

Closer to home, there were reports of local youth focused organisations, such as a local Youth Action Project taking an increased interest in the work of Almond as well as other community and accommodation providers. Officers from West Lothian Council interviewed for our previous evaluation observed that the evidence of Almond's successful involvement in the HF4Y pilot was encouraging other housing providers to get involved:

*"They can see it's joined up, there is support going in... It's more likely the tenancy will be sustained, as the evidence is coming out – there is more interest".*

### **Influencing wider policy**

Almond informants felt that the success of the HF4Y pilot had helped influence Scottish Government to scale up the Housing First model across the country, and the Edinburgh Housing First Pathfinder to include a youth-specific project – a move which is now being taken by other authorities, such as Fife.

West Lothian Council's decision to provide follow-up funding for the HF4Y pilot was identified as positive evidence of 'mainstreaming'. Almond and other social landlords are now being asked to engage with the council's Rapid Rehousing Transition Planning, providing HF properties to older adults.

## 6. Financial considerations

In this section, we consider the financial inputs, risks and potential savings from the HF4Y project from the housing provider's perspective. In our [earlier evaluation](#), we considered the potential cost benefits of the whole project (including the support, as well as the housing offer) for wider systems.

### 6.1. Almond investment in the HF4Y project

Almond's main expenditure has been on furniture and on staff time, both to establish the partnership and the pilot, and to deliver ongoing housing management. All of the external grant funding went straight to Rock Trust to cover costs of the support offer. The only exception were the individual care leaver grants which were claimed for some of the young people from their host local authorities to contribute to furnishing properties. Additionally, Almond gifted £15,000 per annum over the project life to the Rock Trust to contribute towards their running costs. This constitutes more than the operating surplus of the eight tenancies.

#### Furniture

Average expenditure on furniture was around £4.5K per person, though this varied from £3.9K to £5.7K per tenancy. Almond reports that they were able to identify better value suppliers over time, so the young people joining the pilot later on received more furniture for their budget.

A service charge was initially placed on properties to help with set up costs (e.g. the furniture service charge) – but was removed due to being identified as a “benefit trap”. This change also reflected the view of the Board that the offer should reflect a general needs tenancy and not create any disincentives to work.

Each local authority has a different policy/ offer in relation to the amount of grant they offer. West Lothian (the local authority funding all bar one of the 8 people who received a grant) pays £1700 per person; Arbroath funded the full cost of the furniture (just over £4000) for one young person who had been in its care<sup>21</sup>.

#### Housing management input

It has been difficult to accurately assess how much housing management input went into the HF4Y tenancies over the duration of the project; some monitoring of time was undertaken by Almond at the outset, but this was not sustained. Weekly catch-ups with Rock Trust and visits to HF4Y tenants and their properties were recorded in detail over an 8 month period from September 2018 to April 2019, showing a monthly average of 4.75 hours' housing management time per month, costing Almond £125.50 (with on costs).

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<sup>21</sup> UK Government best practice recommendation for care leavers' grants is £2,000 now usually called the Setting up Home Allowance .

The Children's Commissioner for England suggested in October 2020 that this amount should be £4,000. [10 asks for care leavers | Children's Commissioner for England \(childrenscommissioner.gov.uk\)](https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/10-asks-for-care-leavers/)

However, once tenancies had reached steady state – as our case studies illustrate - the feedback from Almond is that HF4Y tenants rarely require additional housing management input. The dedicated Housing Officer was able to re-instate her patch to pre-HF4Y levels after about a year of the pilot, since she felt that the HF4Y no longer caused her additional work.

## 6.2. Comparing the costs of HF4Y tenancies with non-HF4Y tenancies

Almond carried out an exercise to compare the costs related to 8 HF4Y tenants with those related to 15 younger tenants who were not part of the HF4Y project. We present here some headlines from this exercise, with the caveat that the numbers are small, and these findings must therefore be interpreted with some caution.

### Rent arrears

A snapshot of rent arrears suggests that, despite arrears building up for technical reasons during the set up phase, these were mostly ironed out once payment arrangements with local authority and/or DWP were established. Overall, arrears for the HF4Y cohort were 5% - higher than the whole organisation (2.64%), but lower than the comparison group (7%).

### Repairs

The responsive (and potentially rechargeable<sup>22</sup>) repairs bill is around two to three times higher for the HF4Y cohort, than for the non-HF4Y comparison group. However, the cost of individual repairs varies considerably and there are some clear outliers which make accurate comparison difficult. Almond staff pointed out that a recent case in a non-HF4Y property dwarfs any of the HF4Y repairs bills. Almond's Director of Finance and ICT also pointed out that some properties will need more responsive repairs than others as a result of the age, type and condition of the building (i.e. factors that are beyond the control of the tenant) and no attempt has been made to control for that within this comparative exercise.

Nevertheless, Almond suggest several other factors which may explain the higher repair bill in HF4Y – partly the higher risk of damage due to the needs of the cohort, but also due to the fact that repairs are picked up early on and throughout the tenancy because of the regular contact with and home visits by the Rock Trust support worker and the more proactive approach to housing management and regular liaison between Almond and Rock Trust.

The comparison data suggests the positive benefits from keeping on top of responsive repairs and property condition during the tenancy: the termination repairs bill is relatively low for the HF4Y cohort compared to the non-HF4Y cohort, and is skewed by one HF4Y tenancy that was in considerable disrepair when both parties agreed to terminate it.

As illustrated in our case studies, there have been cases in which HF4Y tenants have been supported to pay for damages through a direct deduction from their Universal Credit over

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<sup>22</sup> Where repairs are classed as rechargeable, they have been deemed to be the fault of the tenant.

the course the tenancy. Where damages do not become evident until the end of a (non-HF) tenancy, it may be much more challenging to recoup the recharge from the former tenant.

### Tenancy sustainment

Apart from in one case, HF4Y tenancies have been sustained and/or moves between tenancies managed. Tenancy failure, legal action, turnover and voids are the key financial risks to any landlord. There were fewer void losses and no legal costs for the HF4Y cohort compared to the non-HF4Y cohort.

The data suggests that HF4Y – with its wraparound intensive support offer and the effective partnership working with the landlord described in this report - can reduce and manage the risks associated with tenancy failure in the case of a cohort for whom they would otherwise be very high.

*“Overall, I’d say there was very little difference between the costs of HF4Y and non-HF4Y tenancies.....all these kids still in their houses apart from one and he will be housed – so they are really all still in a tenancy, they are all still housed. Would that happen if there had been no HF or support behind them? I don’t think so!”*  
(Dedicated Housing Officer)

These findings suggest a strong invest-to-save argument here for housing providers as well as for wider systems. If, through the HF4Y model, local young people who are most at risk of long term homelessness and the damaging impacts of that can be supported and settled into sustainable tenancies at the earliest possible opportunity, there is potentially a huge saving, economically, and in terms of human and community impact – all of which can impact further down the line on social landlords like Almond. There are clear advantages to offering a property to a person with multiple and complex needs upstream and with the benefit of a wraparound support offer. The Board noted the increasing pressure on social landlords to allocate properties to homeless people, often without anything like the level of support provided by a HF model.

*“The support is really key”* (Board member)

If homelessness becomes sustained or recurs, the negative impact on the individual, their networks and communities can be considerable: typically, their health, wellbeing and relationships deteriorate, further trauma is experienced and there may be negative impacts on community safety, through crime or anti-social behaviour. There is also evidence to suggest that the financial costs of single homelessness to a range of agencies including local authorities, NHS and the criminal justice sector are considerable and tend to increase over the course of an individual’s homelessness. For example, Pleace & Culhane<sup>23</sup> estimated that 86 single homeless people – some of whom were barely using services – together cost the public sector over £742K in a 90-day period. They found that, on average, preventing homelessness generated cost savings (though not necessarily cashable savings) of almost £10K per person per year.

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<sup>23</sup> Pleace, N. and Culhane, D. (2016). *Better than Cure? Testing the case for Enhancing Prevention of Single Homelessness in England*. London: Crisis UK

## 7. Replicability considerations

Almond attributes the success of its involvement in HF4Y to a number of critical success factors:

- The calibre and commitment of the support provider;
- The vision and passion of staff and managers within Almond to develop an effective housing and support offer for young care leavers; and
- The fit with its own stock, size, financial position and values.

Almond might be seen as being in a ‘Goldilocks’ position to deliver this model effectively; but how might the learning from their experiences inform the decisions and actions of other social landlords in different operating contexts?

### 7.1. Availability of suitable stock

Homeless Link<sup>24</sup> has highlighted the shortage of 1-bed flats in many parts of the UK which, combined with the impact of Welfare Reform (and specifically the Spare Room Subsidy), can mean that even social landlords who are keen to support HF initiatives may struggle to deliver available properties. Almond has a relatively high proportion of smaller flats and is therefore well-placed to identify properties which are affordable to single households.

### 7.2. Geographical location of stock

This report has highlighted the strategic and operational alignment between place-based social landlords and Housing First/ HF4Y, including:

- The opportunities to link to community development work and place-shaping strategies;
- A model of one dedicated and/or a small team of patch-based HOs who can build consistent relationships with young people, support staff, social workers and other professionals, taking a more case-based than a process-focused approach to housing management. This ‘personal touch’ could be much more challenging to replicate in a larger organisation where stock was dispersed and housing management services are provided more centrally.

However, the flip-sides of having geographically concentrated housing stock can include:

- Less choice of location for young people; Board members suggested the importance of brokering relationships with other social landlords to access properties in other areas.
- A risk of young people’s tenancies being too close to each other – Almond had offered neighbouring tenancies to two HF4Y tenants at an early stage of the pilot and had ended up needing to orchestrate a managed move to reduce ensuing neighbour nuisance issues.

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<sup>24</sup> Homeless Link, Briefing: Exploring the relationship between social landlords and Housing First services, July 2020.

### 7.3. Provision of support

As the National Housing Federation has highlighted, the biggest risk to the delivery of HF by social landlords is that the funding for support in a permanent tenancy should come to an end. The Almond Board were acutely aware of this risk, but felt more reassured by the high level of commitment to the project from Rock Trust, which had very much also put its own 'skin in the game' then they might have done had the pilot been initially commissioned by the local authority. The natural and voluntary nature of the partnership was felt to be crucial to its success.

We are aware of various alternative models in which HF – and increasingly HF4Y models are being delivered - including for example:

- A support provider – perhaps commissioned by the local authority - trying to procure housing, usually from a range of sources – including perhaps the PRS
- A housing association-led project in which the support is being provided in-house
- A consortium of housing providers working with a consortium of support providers (e.g. Edinburgh, Greater Manchester)
- Use of local authority housing stock.

There is still, however, learning to be drawn from Almond's experience for those housing providers who are involved in – or considering possible involvement in – different types of partnership. Almond reflected on how 'housing and support speak different languages' and operate with very different objectives: housing has more formal, clear-cut processes to achieve concrete outcomes in relation to housing management; where support is relationship-based and person-centred. Considerable dialogue and mutual challenge is essential in order to bridge the divide.

The HF principle relating to the 'separation' of housing and support has necessitated considerable reflection within the partnership and at times this has been interpreted literally (e.g. that the housing officer should not be offering support) rather than as a lack of conditionality between the terms of the tenancy and the offer or acceptance of support. The evolving partnership seems to demonstrate that some blurring of roles and testing of boundaries on the ground is healthy and normative, provided it is accompanied by regular reflection.

### 7.4. How much HF4Y might Scotland's care leavers need?

Children's Social Work statistics for Scotland<sup>25</sup> suggest that just over 1.8K young people left local authority care in 2019/20, whilst around 6.5K were eligible for aftercare services in that year.

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<sup>25</sup> See [Children's Social Work Statistics for 2019/20](#), Scottish Government

However, only a very small minority of these young people will need a HF4Y offer. The same data set shows the following numbers in care leaver destinations from which HF4Y may draw its referrals:

| Numbers of care leavers with the following destinations                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | 2019 | 2020 |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------|------|
| <b>Supported accommodation/ own tenancy</b> – many of these young people will not need HF4Y but a minority, perhaps around 10% will be at high risk of eviction or abandonment, based on interviews with Rock Trust for our previous evaluation                                               | 223  | 245  |
| <b>"Other" includes residential care, homeless, in custody and other destination</b><br>Whilst some of this group will undoubtedly benefit from HF4Y, not all will be available (e.g. due to custodial sentences) and the risks and needs of some may be too high for an independent tenancy. | 281  | 202  |
| <b>Not known</b><br>By definition, this small group is likely to include young people with a range of needs and circumstances                                                                                                                                                                 | 24   | 31   |

Detailed modelling of the potential demand for HF4Y services in Scotland is beyond the scope of our research, nevertheless, these figures suggest that the numbers are relatively manageable. There might be around 100 young people exiting the care system each year in Scotland who would be suitable for a HF4Y offer. There are around 160 housing associations in Scotland<sup>26</sup>, and most local authorities still own significant stock<sup>27</sup>, so this feels like a manageable in-flow if reliable funding for high quality wrap-around support is available.

<sup>26</sup> <https://www.mygov.scot/organisations/scottish-housing-regulator>

<sup>27</sup> Scottish Government, [Housing Statistics for Scotland 2019](#)

### 7.5. Tips to other housing providers considering HF4Y

The Almond staff and Trustees offered a number of tips to other housing providers if they are considering adopting HF4Y. These are identified in the box below – with the overriding advice being:

*“Give it a go. It’s the right thing to do. Make it appropriate in scale for your organisation.”* (Chair of Almond’s Board)

- Expect quite a bit of upfront work: the groundwork is critical, but it will taper off considerably over time.
- However, people’s journeys will not necessarily be linear – you must expect and plan for lapses, crises and set-backs.
- There are financial risks and ethical implications from deciding to spend some of the organisation’s reserves on buying furniture for a relatively small number of individuals, and in departing from the allocations policy, so it is important to ‘go in with eyes open’ and really weigh this up.
- Do it at the right pace and scale for the size and financial position of your organisation.
- There is no half way step – you are either all in or not; it would be more damaging to offer this for a while and then withdraw than not to do it at all.
- Do it with trusted partners, commissioners/ funders
- Record staff input and other data (what you spend on furniture, hidden costs) clearly and consistently from the output, so as to more accurately monitor and track progress – ‘wish we had done this from the start’.
- Keep staff across the organisation and the Board updated on the initiative: wide understanding and buy-in is key to success, and also allows for benefits to ripple out.