

Transform Community Development

Housing First Dundee

Dundee is Scotland's fourth city, around midway between Edinburgh and Aberdeen; often missed and currently regenerating itself as a modern city with an economy based on academia, life sciences and gaming (Grand Theft Auto, Minecraft and Lemmings were developed here). As in many cities across Europe, two distinct socio-economic realities coexist in Dundee. Dundee also ranks near the top of some unenviable league tables, including those for drug deaths per capita:¹ 74,688 residents (50.2% of the local authority population) live in deprived areas.

Homeless presentations in Dundee remain steady² across all categories, but over the years this has led to a cohort of individuals who are chronically homeless with comorbid conditions whose experience of traditional step-up services has not been positive. This has led to a cycle of tenancy failures for a range of reasons.



Scottish context

There are 32 local authorities in Scotland, and all were required to have a Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan (R RTP), which was a new planning framework for local authorities and their partners to transition to a rapid rehousing approach, including housing first.

In Scotland housing is a human right, so on presentation of homelessness all are given 28 days whilst an assessment is made, meaning that rough sleeping should be minimal.

The turning point

In 2018, Social Bite (a social enterprise) offered funding to six areas across the country as a Housing First pathfinder. This was supported by the Scottish Government and the six local authorities. Dundee City Council (DCC) offered 100 tenancies (eventually supplied by the DCC and Registered Social Landlords (RSLs), such as housing associations.

¹ <https://datamap-scotland.co.uk/simd-local-authorities/dundee-city-social-deprivation/>

² <https://www.gov.scot/publications/homelessness-in-scotland-update-to-30-september-2025/documents/>

This offer was a catalyst that moved Housing First from Year 3 or for aspiration to a Year 1 action within the RRTP. In 2018, Transform Community Development, in partnership with Salvation Army and Dundee Survival Group, developed and delivered a successful pathfinder, which concluded in September 2021, with an evaluation published the following year.³ At the conclusion of the pathfinder the partnership dissolved.

Mainstreaming the pathfinder

Transform Community Development operated a 32-bed direct-access hostel in the centre of Dundee (Jessie Devlin Close), due to the complexity of the profile of people using the hostel, the environment was becoming increasingly unsafe for both service users and staff. Due to repairs and non-payment of rental charges, operating the accommodation was becoming increasingly unviable.

Transform Community Development opened discussions with Dundee Health & Social Care Partnership (DHSCP) and DCC and it was agreed that Housing First would be mainstreamed, by transferring the resources used to fund the hostel accommodation to continue the support of the participants within the pathfinders and expand the provision. There were two areas that we needed to resolve in the transition. Firstly, one limitation of the pathfinder was the ceiling of 100 tenancies meaning participants could not 'graduate' from the programme and recruiting them lay outside the scope. Secondly, the pathfinder had made a commitment to open-ended support, which would have been broken, and the successes of the pathfinder would have been exhausted relatively quickly.

Boris Johnson (Prime Minister, United Kingdom 2019-22) announced a lockdown in response to the COVID-19 pandemic on 23 March 2020, and Jessie Devin Close shut its doors for the final time one week later, after a two-month winding-up process.

In 2023, Transform Community Development closed a second temporary accommodation unit and again the resource was transferred to further expand the Housing First programme. This second tranche of funding ensured that most of Dundee's homelessness funding was directed towards Housing First, and rather than being an additional service it became the default.

Dundee-ising Housing First

Like many colleagues across Europe, it quickly became clear that the municipality had unique characteristics. It was therefore important to ensure that we adapted Housing First to fit the needs of Dundonians and the environment in which they live.

Two key features shaped the Dundee approach:

- Relatively low numbers of people sleeping rough
- The availability of network flats used by DCC as temporary accommodation for vulnerable people presenting as homeless.

³https://pure.hw.ac.uk/ws/portalfiles/portal/65371618/PathfinderEvaluation_FinalReport_Full.pdf



Rather than viewing Housing First solely as a response to rough sleeping, Dundee adopted it as a homelessness prevention strategy. This allowed intensive support to be offered to people threatened with homelessness before they reached crisis point. A clear lesson was that many people in the city were legally homeless but were not sleeping on the streets. Our message was simple: if you do not have a safe and secure home, you may already be experiencing homelessness.

A crucial factor in Dundee's success was securing buy-in from both statutory and third-sector partners. The original vision was that individuals would receive up to 30 hours of support per week where required. This was achieved by establishing Housing First as a key multi-agency intervention rather than simply another homelessness service. As a result, Housing First became embedded not only within the city's homelessness strategy but also within wider strategic plans relating to health, criminal justice, drugs and alcohol services, and community wellbeing.

Importantly, Housing First became one of the first options considered when people with complex needs presented as homeless. This cross-sector collaboration strengthened engagement between housing services, health, mental health services, social work, child protection, housing providers and other key partners.

One of the most significant developments was the growing recognition within the DHSCP that Housing First could both improve outcomes and reduce costs. Social Return on Investment studies demonstrated that people engaging

with Housing First were less likely to have contact with Police Scotland, NHS services, emergency services and homelessness services. The financial benefits were also clear. DCC estimated that the cost of turning over a tenancy could be around

£15,000, and some individuals entering Housing First had previously experienced more than 15 failed tenancies. To date, there has only been one eviction in just over 200 Housing First tenancies. Most had experienced at least one eviction prior to joining the programme.

There have also been encouraging indications of reduced drug-related deaths among people supported through Housing First. While there is no definitive evidence that Housing First alone is responsible, stable housing and intensive support are important contributory factors.

As homelessness services continue to develop, Dundee is exploring new ways in which Housing First can challenge traditional assumptions about homelessness. External funding has been secured to pilot a **Housing First for Youth programme**, based around a newly developed youth hub initiative in Dundee. In addition, £120,000 of Scottish Government capital funding is being used to renovate a building containing ten flats for a single-site Housing First project.

This development will support individuals for whom traditional scattered-site Housing First does not provide sufficient support. It is also being designed with an awareness of emerging challenges, including the impact of county lines activity and cuckooing. The project will be integrated into the mainstream Housing First team and supported by a 24-hour concierge model.

Dundee City Council and Dundee Health & Social Care Partnership view Housing First as the primary mechanism for tackling homelessness. This commitment is reflected in the city's emerging homelessness strategy, which will succeed the Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan (RRTP).

The longer-term ambition is to move away from hostel-based accommodation and invest further in Housing First and community-based support. The challenge, of course, is ensuring sustainable funding. A comprehensive service review is currently examining how resources can be reconfigured to better meet the needs of people requiring Housing First support.

Beyond a house, there are numerous other issues to address. Hostel accommodation often provided a sense of community for the people who lived there. While these communities could sometimes be complex or face health issues, they were often supportive in their own way. The challenge for Housing First is ensuring that individuals have opportunities to build new communities for themselves, whether based on geography, shared interests or personal aspirations.

To address this, Dundee has developed a range of employability and community initiatives. These include ready-meal production through a community kitchen; furniture repair and recycling projects delivered in partnership with a local Men's Shed; volunteering opportunities through food redistribution schemes; and educational opportunities through Dundee & Angus College.

Alongside these initiatives, partnerships have been developed with sports clubs, arts organisations and community groups to promote participation, social connection and enjoyment. Both Dundee FC and Dundee United support weekly indoor football sessions, helping people build confidence, routine and relationships.

It is hoped that the era of large-scale hostels is coming to an end. Previous generations of homelessness services often relied on hostel accommodation where dozens of people shared a single sleeping space, and securing a private room was considered a privilege. Today, the objective is fundamentally different. Ultimately, the goal is not simply to provide accommodation but to end homelessness by giving individuals the opportunity to become active, connected and productive members of their communities. Housing First is about creating the conditions in which people can thrive, contribute and live with dignity in a home of their own.

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