

# Evaluation of the Crisis Housing First service

Invitation to tender

June 2020



**Together**  
we will end  
homelessness



## Summary

This document invites proposals to evaluate the Crisis Housing First service over three years

Through a longitudinal, mixed methods approach the evaluation will assess the outcomes and impact relating to four components:

1. **Process:** How the service works, how it is designed to respond to the needs of the target population, who is involved in delivering the service, etc.
2. **Fidelity:** How closely the service adheres to the core principles of the Housing First model, and which external factors enable or inhibit fidelity of the service in London
3. **Effectiveness:** Service performance and outcomes for clients, and the experience of clients supported by the service
4. **Cost effectiveness:** Whether the service achieves better outcomes than existing homelessness services, and whether it generates savings due to use of other services

The Crisis Housing First service started in November 2019 and operates in the London area. Given the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic and subsequent lockdown that came into effect in March 2020, it will be essential that the evaluation remains responsive to the changing environment. It should aim to assess each of the four components in the pre-, during- and post- Covid-19 contexts.

The evaluation will allow Crisis to contribute to the evidence base on the effectiveness of Housing First in a UK context as well provide evidence each year on how we can improve the model in subsequent years. There needs to be a focus in the evaluation on sharing evidence to influence policy and practice in an accessible format.

Total funding of up to £40,000 (including VAT, travel and subsistence) over three years is available for this evaluation.

The deadline for evaluation proposals is Friday 10 July 2020.



## Background to Housing First

Housing First is a system of support for homeless people with high and complex needs which is designed to deliver a sustainable exit from homelessness, improve health and wellbeing and enable social integration. Housing First uses ordinary housing, which can be privately or socially rented. Housing First is designed to house formerly homeless people with high needs in their own, settled homes as quickly as possible and to provide the support they will need to sustain an exit from homelessness on their own terms.

Housing First uses a mobile team of workers, who visit formerly homeless people in their own homes, providing open-ended and intensive practical and emotional support. Workers need to be prepared and willing to provide practical support with activities such as helping clients with cleaning and tidying their property, as well as accompanying them to meetings, etc. It will also include acting as service brokers, or case managers, who help to arrange access to any services that someone using Housing First needs, such as mental health services, drug services, health care or social work support. Housing First will also ensure someone is housed adequately and has the required range of household goods and furniture to live independently, also providing help with day to day living skills where needed<sup>1</sup>.

In practical terms this means:

- Rapid housing
- No requirement to stay in a homeless hostel, nor in any form of congregate or communal temporary supported housing, prior to housing being provided (it may be necessary to secure access to temporary accommodation pending the sourcing of the right housing, especially if seeking to provide as much choice and control as possible over the individual's housing options)
- No completion of courses, training or other expectations in respect of demonstrating 'readiness' for housing are required before housing is provided
- No requirement for compliance with treatment, including psychiatric and drug/alcohol treatment, before housing is provided and nor is the ongoing provision of housing conditional on engaging with any support.

Housing First is also distinctive in terms of the degree of choice and control given to clients. Someone using Housing First is supported to design their own package of services and help; they design their own process of exiting homelessness. This could include selecting their own support workers after seeing the strengths and interests that the workers have identified through creation of their own profile page. This control also extends to whether someone using Housing First chooses to engage with treatment, including drug/alcohol treatment and mental health services. Both access to housing and retention of housing are **not** conditional

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<sup>1</sup> Pleece, N. (2016) *Housing First Guide Europe* Brussels: FEANTSA <http://housingfirstguide.eu/>



on complying with treatment or behaving in certain ways; housing and support are separated in the Housing First model.

However, Housing First should not be passive; it does not simply offer housing on an unconditional basis to homeless people with complex needs. Housing First workers should engage with service users within a harm reduction framework and follow a recovery orientation, centring on providing people using Housing First with the idea that positive change in their lives, in respect of ending homelessness, improving health, building relationships and becoming part of the community is possible and emphasising that support is available.

Housing First does not tell the homeless people with complex needs using the service how to behave, it does not tell them not to drink or take drugs, but the workers emphasise that positive change – as and when someone chooses to make it – is possible and will be supported.

Peer support, where delivering Housing First involves people who are ‘experts by experience’ in homelessness, is an essential element to the approach succeeding. There is a broad emphasis on a psychologically informed, strength-based approach, focusing on what the people using Housing First can achieve for themselves, what they are capable of, and avoiding any judgements about how someone became homeless<sup>2</sup>. In the feasibility studies into Housing First conducted by Crisis in the Liverpool City Region<sup>3</sup> and in Torbay<sup>4</sup>, the role of peer support was identified in conversations with people with lived experience of homelessness, both in terms of receiving that support but also showing a keenness to become a peer supporter. Homeless people wanted to use their own experience to support others.

The Housing First approach was first developed in New York by Pathways to Housing in 1992. It has since been widely adopted in the USA and become central to the national homelessness strategies in Canada, Denmark, Finland and France, demonstrating widespread success. In England, since 2010, a growing number of local areas have established Housing First services to meet and identified need.

Fidelity to the model is essential and should not be compromised given the risks to the success of the model which have been identified through the extensive evaluation of Housing First in using it inappropriately.

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<sup>2</sup> Padgett, D.K.; Henwood, B.F. and Tsemberis, S (2016) *Housing First: Ending Homelessness, Transforming Systems and Changing Lives* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

<sup>3</sup> Blood, I., Copeman, I., Goldup, M., Pleace, N., Bretherton, J. & Dulson, S. (2017) *Housing First Feasibility Study for the Liverpool City Region*, London: Crisis: <https://www.crisis.org.uk/ending-homelessness/homelessness-knowledge-hub/housing-models-and-access/housing-first-feasibility-study-for-liverpool-city-region-2017/>

<sup>4</sup> Hancock, C. (2017) *Housing First Feasibility Study Torbay*. London: Crisis: <https://www.crisis.org.uk/ending-homelessness/homelessness-knowledge-hub/housing-models-and-access/housing-first-feasibility-study-torbay-2018/>



To be successful, services must follow the key principles of Housing First:

1. Everyone has a right to a home
2. Flexible support is provided for as long as needed
3. Housing and support are separated
4. Individuals have choice and control
5. An assertive engagement approach is used
6. The service is based on people's strengths, goals and aspirations
7. A harm reduction approach is used

## **The Crisis Housing First service**

The Crisis Housing First service started in November 2019 and operates in the London area. It will aim to engage up to 20 people in Year 1, and then increase that offer to a further 20 people in Year 2, making a total cohort of 40 people being supported by the service. It is not a commissioned service.

The Crisis Housing First team is currently made up of one Team Manager and four Coaches, with plans to further expand the team based on the needs of clients. This team will work together flexibly to support a protected caseload of Housing First tenants, understanding their priorities around housing and support. This might include connecting them into mainstream services and community resources and networks, but also offers the opportunity to spend time together, in less formal settings, to begin building trust. Each Housing First Coach will have a caseload of five clients at any one time, depending on progress and mix of support needs. Coaches will support service users to find the right home for them and work collaboratively with the Crisis pan-London housing procurement team to pass on key details around the location and type of housing a client prefers, income entitlement, housing history and historic barriers to housing.

Coaches will complete pre-tenancy work with clients to establish their strengths and existing resources. They can support clients to access interim accommodation, apply for ID, make a benefit claim, advocate at the local authority, attend appointments or spend time doing things a client enjoys. During their tenancy, coaches will provide intensive support to minimise harm and help sustain the tenancy. They will be led by the client to understand their aspirations and support them to develop and implement personalised strategies over time.

Referrals into the service are made through Crisis' own Skylight services and Crisis at Christmas. Outreach teams across London, including Thames Reach and St Mungo's are being encouraged to identify people who would benefit from a Housing First approach and refer them into the service. Interest has also been shown from other community and



statutory services, including Housing Justice, The Outside Project, South London and Maudsley NHS Foundation Trust (SLaM) and the London Borough of Tower Hamlets. Crisis will also take referrals from supported accommodation or night shelter providers working with people who have a history of homelessness and complex needs. The Housing First team members are ultimately responsible for deciding who can access the service and should become involved in supporting the member at the earliest possible opportunity.

## The evaluation

Crisis is seeking a skilled and experienced contractor to undertake an evaluation of the Crisis Housing First service. The aims of the evaluation are to:

1. understand the effectiveness of the Crisis Housing First service for a specific cohort over a time period which encompasses pre-, during- and post- Covid-19 contexts;
2. provide evidence in Years 1, 2 and 3 about the performance of the service and to identify improvements to the model for subsequent years;
3. contribute to the evidence base on the effectiveness of Housing First in a UK context.

Drawing on the approach recommended by the Housing First Guide Europe<sup>5</sup>, the evaluation will include the following four components. Crisis would like the appointed contractor to align the evidence gathering with existing UK evaluations including the three pilots funded by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) and the pathfinder areas in Scotland. The four components are:

### 1. Process evaluation

The evaluation will explore the process of implementation and the quality of the Housing First service by examining questions including:

- 1.1 **What are the goals of the service, and how do project activities work towards achieving these goals?**
- 1.2 **What is the target population and how are they engaged with the service? What are the referral routes into the service? How do these differ from those used in commissioned Housing First services, and what difference does this make?**
- 1.3 **Under what conditions (local context) was the service established, and how does Housing First fit with local strategies to reduce homelessness?**

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<sup>5</sup> <http://www.housingfirstguide.eu/website/wp-content/uploads/2016/HFG/Chapter5.pdf>



- 1.4 How was the service designed, and how does this respond to the needs of the target population?
- 1.5 What are the inputs to the service (resources, staff training and support, etc.) and how do these inputs support service delivery?
- 1.6 Who is involved in delivering the service, what are their roles and which activities do they perform?
- 1.7 How are networks between partner agencies structured and how do they function?
- 1.8 What have the impacts of Covid-19 been on all of the above, and how is the service responding?

## **2. Fidelity assessment**

The evaluation will assess the fidelity of the model used by the Crisis Housing First service and aim to answer questions including:

### **2.1 How closely does the service follow the key principles of Housing First?**

Fidelity should be assessed at a minimum of three time periods; pre-, during- and post- the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic. A validated assessment framework should be employed.

### **2.2 Which external factors enable or inhibit the fidelity of the Crisis Housing First service in London?**

This includes consideration of how such factors may change over time and how this could determine sustainability of the service within an area. Factors should include but are not limited to:

- Capacity of and buy-in from other services (including protocols with statutory services, e.g. health, police, welfare, etc.)
- Internal Crisis policies and procedures and how these align with Housing First
- Attitudes and experience of other stakeholders, e.g. housing providers, landlords (specifically the impact of the Housing First client group for their business, and their experience of providing Housing First accommodation)
- How Housing First fits within Local Authority homelessness strategies



### **3. Effectiveness evaluation**

Crisis is aiming to understand the extent to which a range of outcomes are achieved by people supported through the Housing First service. Crisis suggests that the measurement of outcomes draws on the Housing First Europe Research Hub's evaluation framework which has been tested in Canada and is being used at other sites in Europe. Crisis would also like the appointed contractor to align the evidence gathering with existing UK evaluations including the three pilots funded by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) and the pathfinder areas in Scotland. This will allow results to be directly compared to other Housing First programmes. Analysis of outcomes data should enable insights to be derived about the effectiveness of the Housing First service in pre-, during- and post-Covid-19 contexts. The evaluation should seek to answer questions including:

#### **3.1 To what extent are 'hard' outcomes achieved by the Housing First service?**

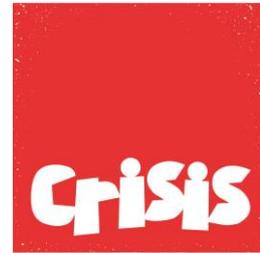
The 'hard' outcomes will include:

- a) No. of new tenancies (by landlord type, e.g. Private rental sector, Housing Association, Council);
- b) Average length of time for an offer of a tenancy;
- c) Average length of time for a tenancy to start;
- d) No. of tenancies sustained at 6, 12, 18 and 24 months;
- e) No. of planned moves and relocations;
- f) No. of tenancies ended and reasons why (i.e. as a result of eviction, abandonment, long-term prison sentence, death of the tenant);
- g) No. of homelessness applications made after HF tenancy ends.

#### **3.2 To what extent are 'soft' outcomes achieved by the Housing First service?**

The 'soft' outcomes will include changes in:

- a) Satisfaction with housing situation;
- b) Mental and physical health;
- c) Wellbeing (to be defined and its component parts considered);
- d) Substance use (drugs and alcohol);
- e) Service use;
- f) Social inclusion (including relationships with family and friends);



- g) Economic status and financial wellbeing
- h) Community engagement and meaningful activity;
- i) Experience of crime (as a victim and/or perpetrator) and challenging behaviour
- j) 'Soft' outcomes that have been identified as important by clients

**3.3 What are the reasons why certain outcomes are achieved or not (including reference to the factors considered in section 2.2 above)?**

**3.4 What is the experience of people supported by the Housing First service?**

#### **4. Cost-effectiveness assessment**

Assess the costs of this Housing First service compared to other homelessness services providing for the same target group to examine these questions:

**4.1 To what extent is the Housing First service achieving better outcomes than existing homelessness services for the same/lower level of spending?**

**4.2 To what extent is the Housing First service generating offsets/savings due to changes in the use of other services (service type, frequency of service use)?**

### **Methodology**

Whilst we are looking for the successful contractor to develop and finalise the methodology for this evaluation it should address the following elements:

- Appropriate evaluation methods should be employed to address each of the evaluation questions, with due consideration paid to the vulnerable nature of the project beneficiaries. In selecting evaluation methods, an appreciation of the limitations imposed by the government's Covid-19 response guidelines should be demonstrated.
- A longitudinal mixed methods approach to the evaluation using quantitative and qualitative techniques to engage beneficiaries, stakeholders and funders.
- The evaluation design should be informed by the voice of people with lived experience of homelessness.
- Crisis will provide access to data collected regularly by the Housing First team and recorded in the Crisis case management system, MAPS, which includes:



- demographics, housing and personal history, support needs, strengths and aspirations, equality and diversity information, benefits entitlements, etc.
- tenancy details and sustainment
- relevant case notes
- Where additional data collected is required to answer the evaluation questions, validated measurement tools should be used where possible to enable data collection that is consistent with other Housing First services in the UK and internationally.
- It is important that the evaluation focuses on improving rather than just proving; it should provide robust evidence which demonstrates the difference made as well as the challenges experienced. Client views of the service will be key to understanding this.
- Interim and final evaluation findings should provide evidence in Years 1, 2 and 3 on the performance of the service and identify improvements to the model for subsequent years to maximise its impact on beneficiaries. The evaluation should produce learning for Crisis and contribute to the evidence base on the effectiveness of Housing First in a UK context.

## Terms of reference

The evaluation will require consultation with internal stakeholders of Crisis and its partner organisations. Stakeholder management and communication will be a key part of this project.

The evaluators will develop an approach in consultation with the Crisis Evaluation Manager and the Head of Research & Evaluation, to ensure that this addresses the evaluation aims. Support will be provided by the Crisis Evaluation team.

## Outputs

The main outputs of this evaluation project are:

- A framework for the evaluation, including a detailed work plan and timetable;
- Regular progress updates at intervals agreed with the Evaluation Manager;
- Interim reports after the first and second years, highlighting findings and recommendations for change to enable learning which directly informs practice improvement where possible;



- A final evaluation report which sets out findings of the four components of the evaluation and of the project overall;
- Innovation in dissemination: External and internal dissemination are vital parts of this evaluation process. As well as supporting engaging communications to our internal stakeholders, we expect the evaluators to assist in the development of innovative dissemination to external stakeholders, including at key launches and events.

## **Funding available and timetable**

Total funding of up to £40,000 (including VAT, travel and subsistence) over three years is available for this project.

Key dates:

- The deadline for evaluation proposals is Friday 10 July 2020
- The successful bidder will be expected to begin work as soon as possible; no later than 1 September 2020.
- A detailed evaluation framework, including work-plan and timetable, will be required no later than 15 September 2020.
- Interim evaluation report should be completed no later than 15 September 2021 and 15 September 2022.
- The final evaluation report should be completed no later than 15 September 2023.

## **Format of bids**

The tender proposal should clearly identify:

- Relevant experience in similar projects/initiatives
- CVs of key members of the evaluation team, including details of two referees
- The proposed method(s) to be used
- A detailed work plan with milestones and deliverables
- The basis on which the fee would be calculated, broken down into different phases as appropriate, and showing the relevant daily rates against each member of the team to be employed on the project
- The staff to undertake key areas of work, and where management responsibility for the project will rest. A single point of contact for all correspondence relating to the project should be provided



- Confirmation that work can start by 1 September at the latest.

## **Evaluation criteria**

Proposals will be evaluated on the basis of the following criteria:

- Full understanding of the specification, including the purpose and scope of the project
- Demonstration of relevant skills and experience of the evaluation team in impact and process evaluation, and in working with vulnerable adults
- Suitability of proposed method(s) and approach for involving different stakeholder groups, including beneficiaries, in the evaluation. In proposing evaluation methods, an appreciation of the limitations imposed by the government's Covid-19 response guidelines should be demonstrated, as well as consideration of appropriate methods over the longer-term
- Demonstration of how the voice of people with lived experience of homelessness informs the evaluation design
- Clear explanation of how the proposed study would:
  - enable Crisis to objectively assess the effectiveness of the project
  - provide recommendations on how to further develop the service offer
  - support Crisis to promote evidence of 'what works' and influence ongoing policy and practice in an accessible format
- Clarity and feasibility of a detailed work-plan, including analysis of risks to successful completion. This includes confirmation that risk assessments are in place that reflect undertaking research and evaluation work in the Covid-19 context
- Value for money

## **Management of the project**

The contractor will be expected to keep the Evaluation Manager informed of progress with periodic summary reports. Crisis, and other members of the project group, will have the opportunity to comment on any draft reports before they are finalised.

Responsibility for this project will lie with the Evaluation Manager, with whom the contractor will be expected to agree a programme of work and deadlines for its deliverables.



## **Intellectual property**

Any information gathered during the course of the project and not already in the public domain is deemed to be the property of Crisis. The information provided in the reports, and the rights to all other outputs, shall become the property of Crisis.

## **Data Protection and confidentiality of data**

The project team must act in accordance with the requirements of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).

## **Submission of proposals and enquiries**

Proposals should be submitted as a Word or PDF document via email.

The deadline for proposals is Friday 10 July 2020.

Proposals must be received by the deadline. Late proposals will not be accepted. Proposals and enquiries must be addressed to:

Erika Moisl (Evaluation Manager): [erika.moisl@crisis.org.uk](mailto:erika.moisl@crisis.org.uk)

Shortlisted applicants will be invited to an interview and required to deliver a detailed presentation of their project plans.

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