

Homeful



Executive summary

Exploring housing-led approaches to
resolve and prevent homelessness

Jo Richardson with Felipe Moreira

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Chartered
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Housing

Acknowledgments

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Thank you all.

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Introduction



Jo Richardson

In July 2021 I launched the *Homeful* project as part of my Chartered Institute of Housing (CIH) presidency. The project's aim was to explore housing-led approaches to resolve and prevent homelessness. Not only street homelessness, but all the ways in which people feel disconnected from the sense of being 'at home'. The research project launch report¹ outlined some of the key challenges for society in addressing this issue – namely the impact of the coronavirus pandemic and the emerging cost-of-living crisis, on top of a longer-term shortage of properly affordable, social housing to rent. Moreover, it included emergent examples of ways in which the social housing sector and public/charitable partners are working together to provide an agile, joined-up response to an acute rough-sleeping homelessness need.

I coined the word 'homeful' at the start of my campaign as the combination of 'hopeful' and 'home', and also as an antonym to homeless.

“Acute shortages of decent, affordable homes cause homelessness and ruin lives.”

From the main *Homeful* report foreword by
The Lord Richard Best OBE DL, Member of the House of Lords
Built Environment Committee

¹ Available at www.cih.org/homeful

What is home?

In 2019, I published a book called *'Place and Identity: The Performance of Home'*². It drew on two decades of research as well as my experience of being a housing officer and own understanding of 'home'. It concluded that a physical dwelling (whether that is a house, a flat or other structure such as a trailer on a Gypsy/Traveller site) was necessary, but not sufficient, to create 'home'. There are six other conditions that need to be in place, in addition to the existence of a physical dwelling:

- **Security:** that it is mine for as long as I need or want it.
- **Affordability:** of rent or mortgage and of the associated bills to make the dwelling function as a home, such as heating, light and broadband.
- **Safety:** of the physical dwelling, that it is not injurious to my or my family's physical or mental health; and that I am safe, from others, within that place.
- **Quality of space:** appropriate location, near to facilities, connected to nature and humanity, on a bus route or within walking distance to the library, the swimming pool, the school – the activities that enrich our lives.
- **Privacy:** of place for my personal space, but with porous enough boundaries to allow for:
- **Connectedness:** with humans within these walls and beyond, both in person as well as digitally enabled connectivity to mitigate feelings of loneliness and isolation.

² Richardson, J (2019) *'Place and Identity: The Performance of Home'*, London: Routledge

Methodological approach to the *Homeful* research

The primary data collection took place between Spring and Autumn 2022. We:

- Read relevant **policy, practice** and **academic literature** to help inform the context for the work and the design of the surveys and workshops.
- Spoke with **42 people** leading services for homelessness and housing need across the social housing and charitable sectors.
- Collected online surveys from **41 housing providers**.
- Completed online, semi-structured interviews with **35 housing professionals** who preferred this option to information sharing, rather than completing a survey.
- Received surveys from **125 tenants**.
- Got input from **47 people** who took part in workshops facilitated by five housing organisations (of whom 45 had experience of homelessness).
- Partnered with **People of the Streets (POTS)** on a photovoice project, which provided photographic training and a platform for people with lived experience of homelessness to share their stories.
- Partnered with **SoCrowd** on the *#homeis* social media campaign.
- Collected **four narratives** to record women's experiences of homelessness in Leicester in partnership with De Montfort University and InHerStrength.
- Coded and analysed **surveys, workshop transcriptions** and **interviews** to identify themes in the data collected.



Findings themes



Here is a summary of the main themes we saw in responses from housing providers, residents and people with lived experience of homelessness:

- **Rule books were ‘torn up’ during the coronavirus pandemic** – as a result, rough sleeping was largely ended in that period.
- **Partnerships and information sharing** were the key to making things happen, particularly those that involved health and care services, as well as criminal justice.
- **There was a renewed focus on people**, rather than processes and systems.
- **Organisations worked with people** from a pre-tenancy stage to build in prevention of future homelessness, and they worked more with young people and their families.
- Housing providers noticed more **presentations of homelessness** coming from the private rented sector than before.
- **Housing providers were thinking of a ‘paradigm shift’** – a need for a ‘whole system’ approach to resolving issues rather than single-service processes, they were looking to invest more time and resources to this approach.
- **There was a renewed focus on getting the ‘basics’ right** – knowing what overall condition the properties were in (not just single repairs knowledge) and knowing how the tenant is overall (not just one aspect of their interaction with them).

- **Housing First is a gold standard approach that works**, but it is one of a spectrum of measures that can be taken to resolve and prevent homelessness.
- London and global cities have homelessness issues as a result of **overheated housing markets** and **limited affordable housing supply**, but so too do smaller rural coastal communities where there is a sense of being left behind.
- Housing providers seemed determined not to let things go **'back to normal'** after the pandemic, but rising homeless numbers (especially in temporary accommodation) seem to be showing that we are indeed going 'back to normal'.
- **Tenants identified with 'home' beyond the bricks and mortar** – talking about safety, security, community, support, friends and family.
- Tenants felt there was a role for **government to invest in more affordable housing**; they also thought a more holistic approach to affordable housing supply was necessary.
- Women, children and young people experienced a particularly stark impact from **housing precarity** and **homelessness**.
- The voices of **lived experience of homelessness** were valuable and vital to the design and delivery of housing and homelessness services, particularly in shaping appropriate trauma-informed approaches.



Overarching conclusions

Some overarching themes emerged across the various data sets, which lead to some observations and conclusions for the future of resolving and preventing homelessness:

- A need for more **proactivity, less reactivity** and **less paternalism**.
- The importance of **lived experience** and **listening to the customer** when developing and delivering services.
- **Tenancy sustainment** is a vital element of homelessness prevention, and more roles should be aligned to this proactive approach.
- There is a need for housing organisations to find or win funding **to deliver support services around mental and emotional wellbeing support**, as not everyone meets the increasingly high bar set for accessing children's and adults' mental health services.
- **Joint working is necessary to resolve and prevent homelessness** – housing, health, social care and criminal justice organisations need to work together strategically. During the pandemic there were some new and strengthened partnerships with housing and health.
- **Community relationships** and **conflict resolution** are important parts of the approach to prevent homelessness and sustain tenancies and resilient neighbourhoods.
- **There is a need for less bureaucracy and more flexibility to effect change for social housing customers**. This was seen especially with the rapid responses made during 'Everyone In' and a feeling that by stepping out of the 'rules' and usual practice, it was possible to 'get things done'.
- If '**levelling up**' is to make sense to real lives, then **funding to support increasing affordable housing supply** needs to be seen in rural coastal communities as well as in global cities. Need is growing across many communities in the UK – it is not just an urban issue.
- **Women, children and young people must be heard**, and trauma-informed approaches should be designed into service delivery to ensure we keep people safe and 'at home'.

Conditions for 'home'



There is wide-ranging good practice across different parts of the social housing sector and by partner organisations. They broadly track the seven conditions of home, as follows:

- 1 Security** – proactive prevention/tenancy sustainment
- 2 Affordability** – responding to the cost-of-living crisis/new and increased supply of affordable homes
- 3 Safety** – wellbeing and support of tenants, particularly women and young people
- 4 Quality of space** – adapting properties to meet need/thinking about geographical places, particularly rural communities
- 5 Privacy** – reducing the use of temporary accommodation to meet homelessness need
- 6 Connectedness** – community and relationships
- 7 Flexibility and adaptive practice of housing providers** – joint working and innovation for a paradigm shift.

The main *Homeful* report includes case study examples to share ideas and lessons learned.

Homeful ingredients for the future

Across the data collected for the *Homeful* project – published reports, survey and interview results and lived experience workshops – a number of ‘key ingredients’ emerged from participant responses and practice examples. We also specifically asked housing leaders what they felt were the ‘key ingredients to success’ in ending homelessness. Leaders in the housing sector focused on people and connection in the ingredients they saw during the Everyone In period of the pandemic:

- **A coalition of the willing**
- **Having the right people in the right place**
- **Accountability through agreement**
- **Political leadership**
- **Challenge** (push back on the status quo or resistance) **and persistence.**



The other data in the *Homeful* research suggests that for the future, in order for us to end homelessness, ingredients will need to include:

UK Government

- **Lift the cap on Housing Benefit** – frontline services have been observing a rise in the number of families at risk of homelessness and a Bureau of Investigative Journalism analysis³ (October 2022) shows 98% of properties advertised to let are beyond the reach of those on benefits.
- **Stopping the sale of council homes through Right to Buy in England** – following the practice of Scotland and Wales on this.
- **Maintaining the threshold (of ten homes) for requiring new developments to include ‘affordable’ housing** – this is particularly important in rural areas where up to two-thirds of affordable housing is provided through planning gain agreements⁴.
- **Amplifying the longer-term approach to rough sleeping funding**, taken in the comprehensive spending review in 2021, but joining the dots between government funding pots, both for rough sleeping initiatives and for wider initiatives to prevent homelessness linked with health, care and social justice.
- Adopting measures to monitor housing association performance on homelessness by the social housing regulator, as recommended by *Homes for Cathy* and the *Kerslake Commission*. The approach taken by the Scottish Housing Regulator offers a useful framework⁵.
- **Reflecting historic values of the social housing movement in lettings policies and processes** – with housing associations to reflect on barriers in systems and processes in order to take an increased amount of homelessness nominations from local authorities in their properties.

All four UK governments

- **Investing in social housing** through better capital grant provision to increase supply.

³ [Lack of affordable lets leaves families with little left to live on — The Bureau of Investigative Journalism \(en-GB\) \(thebureauinvestigates.com\)](#)

⁴ DCLG (2014) ‘Section 106 Planning Obligations in England 2011 – 2012, [Title \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#)

⁵ <https://www.housingregulator.gov.scot/for-landlords/regulatory-framework>

Social landlords

- Adopting a more **robust risk appetite among councils** to consider alternative models of funding (including private finance) to build social housing for rent.
- Continuing to **focus on 'the basics'** to ensure social landlords know the state of repair for all properties, and know the wellbeing of all tenants.
- **A renewed focus by housing providers** on 'joining the dots' and piecing together separate service level information for a whole system/whole household view that goes beyond the basic 22 Tenant Satisfaction Measures.
- **Ensuring minimum professional educational standards** for qualified housing professionals to work in the social housing sector, based on the CIH values-led professional standards. Incorporating these into recruitment, appraisal, CPD and promotions criteria in the social housing sector, so that all employees understand the purpose of the organisation and focus on outcomes for tenants.
- **Properly listening to and understanding tenants and customers** through data collection and analysis/segmentation. Finding out what they need to create and maintain 'home'.
- More organisations signing up to the **Homes for Cathy** principles⁶, particularly in thinking about preventing homelessness from within the sector.
- Incorporating **Harry's Pledge**⁷ in understanding what makes 'home' and considering the needs of people with disabilities and their carers in the design and allocation of affordable housing properties.
- **Recognising the importance of furnishing a property** to help make it a home, and providing facilities to help the home 'perform' for residents – offering furnished social tenancies to help end furniture poverty.

⁶ <https://homesforcathy.org.uk/commitments/>

⁷ <https://harrys-pledge.org.uk/>

More thankyous

Homeful was also a charity fundraising campaign⁸ to support the work of **End Youth Homelessness**. This focused on a 'big walk' undertaken from mid-April to the end of May 2022 along the South West Coast Path. In addition to raising over £50,000, the charity walk enabled me to talk to people along the way to hear their housing stories and to make observations of neighbourhoods as passed through them.

The *Homeful* campaign and project saw the very best in the social housing sector. I am grateful to everyone who participated in the research and all those who participated in or donated to the fundraising campaign. Together we raised over £54,000 to support the work of the charity group End Youth Homelessness across the whole of the UK.

I am grateful for the expertise and advice of the research 'sounding board' members throughout the process. The organisations who ran *Homeful* workshops with residents and community members were invaluable, as too were those who provided information for the practice examples in this report. Grateful thanks are due to residents and community members who shared their lived experience.

Finally, thanks are due to the Chartered Institute of Housing for their support throughout my presidential term, and to De Montfort University for allowing me the space and support to undertake the project.



⁸ www.justgiving.com/campaign/homeful

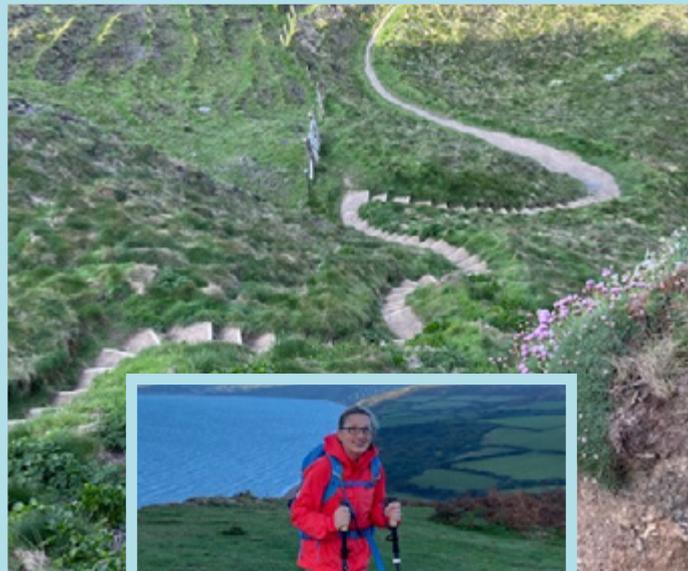
Jo's fundraising walk



35,000 metres of climbs and descents
(equivalent to four Mount Everests)



630 miles



12 ferries



880 gates



436 stiles



26,000 stairs up & down



135,000 calories burned

1,718,651 footsteps



+12,000

feet fallen at pace, in a skydive with 21 housing colleagues

£54,108 raised

www.justgiving.com/campaign/homeful





Contact us

To find out more about Homeful and the housing-led approaches to homelessness featured in this report, please visit www.homefuluk.our.dmu.ac.uk or www.cih.org/homeful.

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