



What good looks like in Supported Housing

Crisis Best Practice Standards

January 2023



Together
we will end
homelessness



Quality housing

Supported Housing providers should deliver an environment where tenants can make a home, have privacy, feel safe, and live in comfort and dignity.

The current energy crisis highlights the importance of energy efficient buildings, that can be heated and retain heat in an efficient and cost effective way. When trying to find properties to use for Supported Housing providers should look for houses that can be refurbished or maintained to ensure energy efficiency. This may include; thoughtful design (no wasted spaces), insulated air tight structures, well-insulating windows and doors, plenty of natural light and energy efficient LED lamps. Providers may also want to explore opportunities for affordable or sustainable fuel sources for example renewable energy providers or use of solar panels.

Providers can make a house a home by; involving tenants in decisions about how the spaces are used and facilitating agreements between tenants to make sure that everyone understands their roles and responsibilities within the household.

Adequacy of space directly affects a tenant's capacity to enjoy their home in comfort and with dignity. It is a powerful contributor to health and well being and an important driver of successful tenancy sustainment.

Providers should consider who has access to which rooms, is there space to socialise (cooking, dining facilities) but also space for privacy (support consultation, bedrooms, bathrooms).

Feeling safe is influenced by a combination of tangible (physical building) and intangible (environmental) factors. Beyond the legal requirements for a residential property to be considered suitable for occupation (e.g., fire, electric, gas and building safety), experiences of safety at home are subjective and contextual.

Feelings and perceptions of safety are linked with the physical building and the immediate environment, including having control over locking the external door, knowing the building structure is strong and that there are adequate fire protections.

Some interventions around building management preferences can be subjective, some people may feel that buzzer entry access systems to blocks of flats, having a bedroom at the rear or on a higher floor makes them feel less vulnerable to intrusions, whereas others may find those same environments claustrophobic or prescriptive. Careful consideration should therefore be given to how to enhance the capacity of tenants to feel safe on a case-by-case basis.

Emotional safety can also be improved by making sure individuals have access to mental health support and necessary medication.



Appropriate referrals

It is essential that referrals into Supported Housing come through a route agreed with the Local Authority or relevant commissioning body. Referrals to Supported Housing should be for people with genuine support needs (not as a replacement for general needs housing options) and should relate to an offer of decent housing and genuine support provision (by accredited or Registered Providers).

Tenants should be part of in depth assessment of their support and safeguarding needs so that they can be matched with a provider that caters to their individual needs. Attention must be paid to the tenants already living in the accommodation to recognise and prevent any potential conflicts.

Local authorities need to do due diligence on the referrals they are making and perform in person visits to properties/providers to ensure that the housing and support offers are good quality and appropriate for the client.

Qualified staff

Staff should be appropriately qualified, experienced and skilled to respond to the needs of their tenants. Supported Housing providers are responsible for ensuring that their staff are trained to deal with the specific challenges that their tenants may be facing. Providers should engage in sector training on creating and operating within Psychologically Informed Environments and in a trauma informed way.

Trauma informed

Trauma informed practices and psychologically informed environments are key elements of good supported housing provision. We can create Psychologically Informed Environments with:

- Open and welcoming spaces
- Empathy and be careful with sensitive relationships
- Meaningful supervision meetings with staff, building on the positives and being ready to support if there are challenges
- Transparency about rules, roles and response times and,
- Reflecting and continually learning, adapting and developing practices within a service



Quality support

A key principle of support in transitional Supported Housing is planning for the future.

Historically, Supporting People funding limited accommodation and support in Supported Housing to two years. This meant that future planning was embedded into support as everyone involved including local authorities, tenants and support workers were conscious that this transitional housing was a time limited opportunity, and those who were being housed through exempt rents would need to return to either social or private renting within 2 years, and either allocations or deposits would need to be ready for them when they left.

We also know that for staff to conduct good quality support, they need manageable case loads which allow them to focus on individual journeys and development. We suggest a maximum case load of 7 clients per support worker for those in Housing First environments with high complex needs, this should be replicated in environments where clients require intensive long term support

The level of support that tenants need may change over time so level of support needs should be assessed and case loads adjusted accordingly. A higher caseload may be appropriate when working with people with less complex support needs, or when people are becoming more independent and comfortable with their roles and responsibilities within the household. Once they are better integrated into their community they may become less reliant on their support worker.

Staff need sufficient and ongoing training to be able to support tenants to:

- Care for themselves: cooking, washing, using tools to look after their mental health,
- Sustain a tenancy: tidying, cleaning, maintaining relationships with other tenants,
- Care for the property: monitoring energy expenditure, cleaning filters on washing machines, driers, dishwashers, looking after the property exterior (garden, porch, driveway) preventing damp,
- Engage with the community: joining the library, finding volunteering opportunities, build relationships and find common ground.

Support should be based on the strengths of the individual, empowering them to realise and exercise their potential.



Affordable

The National Statement of Expectations of Supported Housing sets out expectations of providers to ensure value for money when providing homes through exempt rents.

Housing costs for supported housing can be higher than normal housing, however, it is important that housing costs in supported housing are reasonable, appropriate and represent value for money. For example, service charges must represent the actual cost of the services and it should be clear what each charge covers. Providers and local authority teams should work together to establish what costs are reasonable for rent and eligible service charges in each case. These charges are payable by the local authority through housing benefit, and tenants should not be charged any additional costs by providers to pay for their support.

One of the key challenges for both providers and tenants in supported accommodation is managing the transition to light touch / no support while the tenant joins or re-joins the workforce but is unable to afford deposit and rent in the private rented sector.

The answer to this challenge is supporting tenants to plan for their move to settled housing. This may include tailored interventions for clients depending on what the trajectory of their long term housing provision is likely to be. For example, some tenants may have priority need, live in an area with sufficient social housing and may reasonably expect to be able to secure social housing with the right support. However, for many individuals moving on from Supported Housing, the Private Rented Sector will be the most secure form of tenure they can expect.

For tenants planning to move on into social housing, support may include applications for housing through the local authority, getting on a waiting list and bidding for properties. It may also include helping to look for affordable furniture and tenancy training on how to keep a property safe and comfortable. Providers may also want to talk to vulnerable clients about cuckooing and the risks of eviction if other people damage or demonstrate anti social behaviour within their accommodation.

Some clients may need to be equipped for move on into the Private Rented Sector. Similar training for those in Social Housing will apply, but with additional education: budgeting to save for a deposit (and setting appropriate policies in place to allow for the shortfall in Housing Benefit claims as tenants re-enter work) helping to search for and secure a property, accredited tenancy training including rights and responsibilities, tenancy deposit schemes, different types of tenure and who to contact or where to get support if you are struggling to manage your tenancy.



Accessible

Providers should ensure that properties are physically accessible and adaptable. People should be able to comfortably enjoy their home and be independent and active within their communities. It is important for providers to try and deliver homes that are within reasonable distance of important local amenities, services and transport links, and adopt a housing-led, person-centred approach to allocations and lettings.

It is reasonable to assume that people who need temporary or interim Supported Housing are likely to have experienced a change in circumstances that has been traumatic, or that they have been exposed to trauma at some point in their journey. For example, many people accessing supported housing will have at least one vulnerability which means that they have been unable to maintain a tenancy independently, or they are leaving prison, fleeing domestic violence, leaving hospital, foster or local authority care. This means that the support they receive must be trauma informed and emphasise physical, psychological, and emotional safety for and empower individuals to re-establish control of their lives.

For those who have ambitions and potential to live independently, Supported Housing providers and support workers should be proactively supporting positive move on options.

Settled

In the context of homelessness, Supported Housing is technically unsettled as it is not a long-term solution and is an interim provision for individuals that need time and support to learn or re-learn how to manage living independently. However, there are steps providers can take to make the accommodation offer as supportive, reassuring and reliable as possible.

Communication with tenants is key as it is important that the individual understands what type of tenancy agreement they have, whether their access to the property is time limited, and what sort of next steps and progression are expected of them.

Supported Housing should be provided as part of a pathway to permanent independent living. It is the responsibility of both the provider and the local authority to map the level of need in an area to make sure that appropriate housing is available for those who need it.



ACH case study

Ashley Community Housing is a social enterprise comprised of a diverse group of strategists and researchers led by lived experience. They provide supported accommodation, and tailored integration services that not only help individuals, but also disrupt the systems that have entrenched inequalities in our society.

They have a track record of delivering effective support services that give refugees and migrants the tools they need to succeed. ACH received a grant from Crisis to pilot a Critical Time Intervention approach within their services over 2 years.

Move-on housing is just one of the ways the ACH supports refugees and vulnerable migrants' integration into the UK. The process of accessing our move-on housing first starts with our supported Accommodation.

When a client approaches ACH for housing, a risk assessment and support plan are completed to establish what kind of support the individual needs. A Personal Integration Plan (PIP) is then created to facilitate the integration process. Each resident in our support accommodation has a dedicated Support and Integration Officer, working with the individual to prepare them for independent living. The support provided includes signing up for healthcare, learning to budget, learning about laws and regulations, language services, learning to interview, skills for employment and other transferable skills. The primary objective of our supported housing is for our tenants to feel more positive about their future and to develop the skills necessary to live fulfilling independent lives. Our tenant's support needs are reviewed every three months, with a new set of goals being agreed to make sure that momentum is maintained. Once an individual finds full-time employment they are then ready to move into mainstream accommodation.

Due to the competitive and expensive nature of the private rented sector in Bristol we provide move-on accommodation ourselves. Additionally, the current housing crisis within Bristol means that the wait list for the housing register for social housing can often take years, especially for clients who do not possess priority needs. However, our tenants need a comfortable roof over their heads and affordable accommodation now. Move-on housing is perfect for tenants who have recently secured employment but are struggling to access appropriate accommodation privately. Currently, we have a mixture of 12 flats and houses and one large hostel with 19 rooms—these properties house around 70 tenants. We currently have five tenants in our supported accommodation who are ready to transition into Move-On housing.

All the properties are completely renovated and decorated throughout by our in-house maintenance team. This includes new kitchens, carpets, bedrooms and bathrooms. In addition, properties are health and safety checked to ensure they are safe, secure, and comfortable for our tenants. These properties are sometimes operated and managed through partnerships. For example, our newest property Hampton Lodge has been vacant for a while, and its owners have allowed ACH to refurbish and renovate it entirely, so it is now fit for use. ACH subsidises these costs fully at around £30,000.



Our tenants are offered great accommodation at an affordable rate which helps tenants transition into independent living. The rent rate is around £380 per month (significantly below the Bristol market rate), which also includes other services such as utilities and cleaning making it affordable for tenants who earn minimum wage or are on zero-hour contracts. There is no fixed tenancy; tenants will stay in the Move-On accommodation around three years on average. ACH reserves subsidise these services, and because of the low rent and refurbishment services, ACH will often operate these properties on a breakeven basis, sometimes making a small loss.

In November 2021 one of our tenants transitioned from living in a shared house to move-on housing. In an interview, he shares his experience. When asked, "how has ACH helped you secure housing?" he answered, "with everything." H had previously lived in Cardiff and Swansea, Wales since 2019. He said it was a struggle to find a house and that it was too difficult to rent. He was referred to ACH through word of mouth and was given a support assessment and a support worker.

This process enabled H to move to Bristol and into a shared house where he lived with four people. At this time, H was granted leave to remain which allowed him to apply for family reunion and within around five months his wife and two children arrived in the UK.

In late 2021, ACH finished renovating a house in Easton, Bristol with a complete refurbishment of the interior in an amazing and comfortable way. H approached ACH with information about his family reunification and his Housing Officer prioritised that they would be housed. Our Housing Officer gave H the keys to the newly renovated house in Easton ready for his family to move in two days later. His wife said during the interview that she was always afraid of moving to the UK and having no housing and was worried the family would become homeless, however, she described moving into the property as straightforward and with no stress at all commenting that at one point ACH also allowed H and his family to borrow money to pay for their gas and electric.

This programme strengthened the family's integration, not only by providing their family with a secure and stable house but helping with their independence. H's support worker helped him open a bank account and helped them to use mobile banking to enable him to pay bills. ACH also provided them with a voucher to buy a TV which the family uses to watch cartoons and Iranian movies together, this not only helps the whole family connect to home but helps them learn English.

When asked about their favourite thing about the move-on housing they stated that they have a nice shower and it's great having a garden where their kids can play and being able to be outside, especially in the summer when they have lots of barbecues and they cook delicious kebabs. Both parents added that another great thing about living in the move-on house is that one of their children goes to school very close to their house which is great for their child. Sometimes they can even see their child playing in the playground or in a classroom from their house. They also stated that although their oldest child misses home, they are really enjoying life in Bristol.



Both tenants state throughout the interview that they wish they could live there forever. They treat their home as if it was their own house, respecting it so much so that they remove their shoes at the door before entering the house. Despite this, the parents worry that they will be kicked out, as often this is what happens to refugees, however, we assure them that they are not at risk of eviction.

This house that our tenants have made into a home is a steppingstone until their family is able to access appropriate permanent housing. This home which aids their integration provides hope for their future, in the past few months, H has passed his driving test and hopes to one day buy a car so that his family can take a trip to a beach. Both parents continue learning English and hope that their children will continue studying hard as both children each have hopes to become a doctor and an engineer.



Useful links:

Sector training: <https://www.nhas.org.uk/>

University of Southampton Psychologically Informed Environments – Good Practice Guide:

<https://eprints.soton.ac.uk/340022/1/Good%2520practice%2520guide%2520-%2520%2520Psychologically%2520informed%2520services%2520for%2520homeless%2520people%2520.pdf>

Homes for Cathy PIE workshop: <https://homesforcathy.org.uk/workshop-presentations/>

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/15o1nGpJszGvg5CwhgkG3utvWkyHFeiY>

Homes for Cathy Tenancy and life skills presentation

https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1191ycj96Ut_LbyrVkVk4ZBkPPwVugTLL

Keeping us Safer: Working with women with multiple disadvantage

<https://www.mungos.org/publication/keeping-us-safer-an-approach-for-supporting-homeless-women-experiencing-multiple-disadvantage/>

Women's Aid service for people working with victims of Domestic Abuse

<https://www.womensaid.org.uk/what-we-do/i-work-with-survivors/dedicated-service-for-professionals/>

Women's Aid National Quality Standards <https://www.womensaid.org.uk/what-we-do/national-quality-standards/>

IMKAAN - VAWG sector sustainability shared standards

<https://safelives.org.uk/sites/default/files/resources/Shared%20Standards%20Whole%20Document%20FINAL.pdf>

This list is not exhaustive, we recommend speaking to your local authority and/or commissioner about local standards, expectations, quality assurance agreements

