

# More than 500 rough sleepers given new start thanks to Housing First scheme in West Midlands

- 515 people find new accommodation thanks to Housing First Scheme in West Midlands
- Pilot tackles homelessness for people with multiple and complex needs
- Having a place to live gives tenants better access to community support, health care and social benefits

Minister for Rough Sleeping and Housing Eddie Hughes and West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) Mayor Andy Street today met a number of people in Walsall who are benefitting from the region's successful Housing First pilot (24 March 2022).

Backed by £9.6 million government funding the WMCA pilot gives people who have experienced rough sleeping a home with intensive support for problems such as mental, psychological, or emotional ill health, drug or alcohol dependency, or experience of domestic violence and abuse.

Unlike other schemes, housing is provided regardless of whether people take up the support that is offered. They are given a choice about where to live, the services on offer to them and whether they wish to use them, and the evidence has shown that this leads to positive outcomes.

Minister for Rough Sleeping and Housing Eddie Hughes said:

Walsall has shown that the Housing First model works for people who have been stuck in a cycle of rough sleeping for years.

The tenants we met today have shown the importance of having a safe place to call their own as they help to address the trauma, addiction, and mental health issues they may face and to begin to turn their lives around.

Housing First is one of a range of measures put in place to end rough sleeping including our Rough Sleeping Initiative and the Rough Sleeping Accommodation Programme.

Housing First principles were introduced in England in 2016, after success in America, Canada, and in European countries including Denmark, France, and Finland and were a government manifesto commitment announced in the 2017 Autumn budget.

In 2018, £28 million was allocated to the West Midlands (WMCA), Greater Manchester (GMCA) and Liverpool City Region (LCRCA) and pilots were set up to

test, if this type of intervention could be successful in supporting England's most entrenched rough sleepers.

The pilots now in their fifth year have cumulatively supported over 1,000 of the most entrenched rough sleepers across 23 Local Authorities. Without provision such as Housing First, these individuals would not be in accommodation. A comprehensive external evaluation of the pilots will be published in full in 2023.

Peter (54) was a drug user with a history of depression and was homeless after not coping with the loss of family members. He was given a Housing First flat in 2020.

If it weren't for Housing First, I would still be on the streets begging, sleeping rough. Having people urinate on me, try and beat me up and try and set me on fire.

Having my own place is absolutely heaven – I haven't got any worries and I get a lot of support, if it weren't for this scheme and my support worker I'd probably be dead.

Andy Street, Mayor of the West Midlands, added:

Since day one as Mayor I have made tackling homelessness and rough sleeping a top priority.

That's why I was so determined to secure a Housing First pilot for the West Midlands, and why I am delighted it has proved such a success with more than 500 rough sleepers helped into a home of their own.

Where Housing First has proved such a breakthrough initiative is in the way in which it not only provides a home for people to call their own, but also the wrap-around support that allows some of society's most vulnerable people to tackle their demons and move forward in life.

We know the country's finances are challenged and difficult decisions have to be taken, but I am hopeful that the pilot's success in the West Midlands will lead to the government extending our Housing First scheme and ultimately allow us to help more vulnerable people across the region into a home of their own.

Councillor Adrian Andrew, Deputy Leader of Walsall Council said:

We're really proud of what has been achieved in Walsall to date in partnership with GreenSquareAccord and Walsall Housing Group.

The Housing First model doesn't just change lives for the better –

it's my firm view that it has saved lives too. Our strong partnership is key to this success story.

Walsall Housing Group Corporate Director of Operations Fay Shanahan said:

By working with our partners in Walsall we have been able to make a real difference to the lives of people struggling with homelessness.

We have had huge success in supporting rough sleepers to sustain their tenancies, proving how the Housing First approach of combining a stable home with tailored support really works.

Paul Wright, Director of Specialist Support at GreenSquareAccord, said:

This innovative pilot scheme doesn't just help homeless people into accommodation of their own, but it enables us to offer specialist and targeted ongoing support. Four years into the programme, we have housed and supported over 100 rough sleepers and have had no tenancy failures.

The joined-up approach that has been adopted between the local council, landlords and us as support provider, all working together, has helped to make this a fantastic success.

The West Midlands pilot is the first in the country to exceed its target of bringing 500 people off the street and into Housing First accommodation.

The pilot has provided funding for Housing First to be delivered across the seven WMCA region areas and supported the following number of people in each area:

- Birmingham – 175
- Walsall – 102
- Solihull – 25
- Wolverhampton – 50
- Coventry – 67
- Dudley – 38
- Sandwell – 58