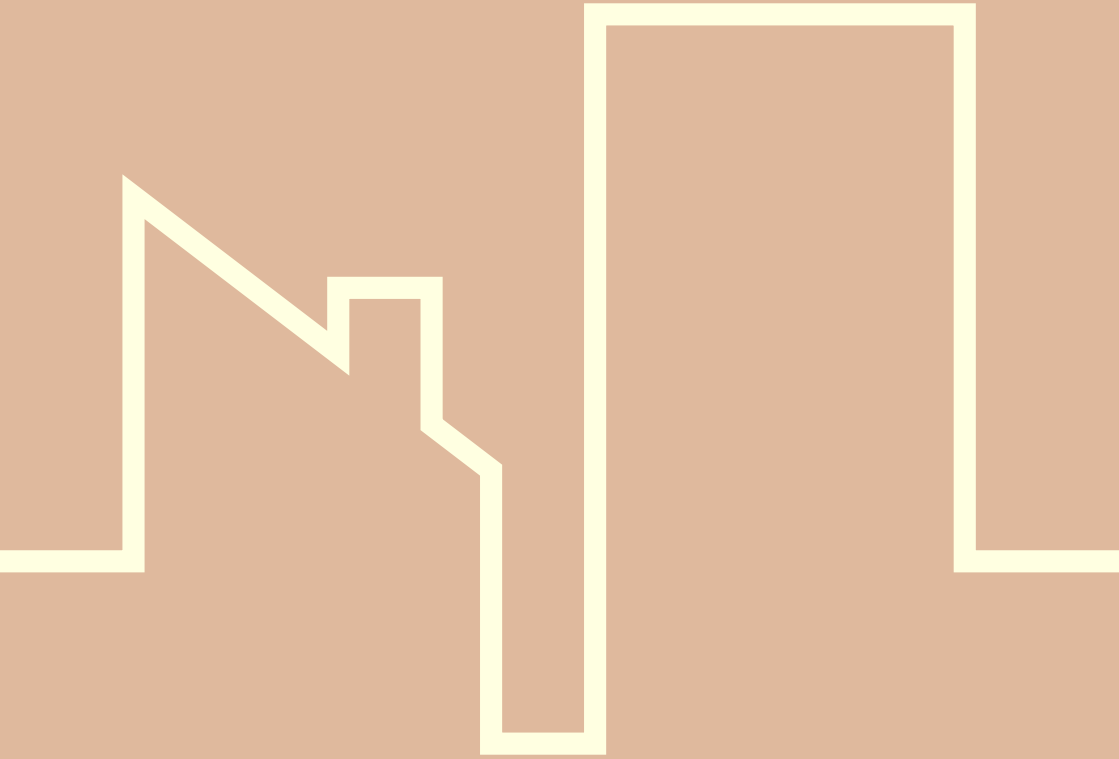


local action plan



**homewards**  
northern ireland

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# Executive summary



## Homewards is...

A five-year, locally led programme, launched by Prince William and The Royal Foundation of The Prince and Princess of Wales in June 2023.

## The aim of Homewards is...

To demonstrate that together, it is possible to end homelessness – making it rare, brief, and unrepeated.

## Homewards was inspired by...

Successful projects from across the UK and around the world, all of which had one mission: to prevent and end homelessness.

They brought together all sectors of society and started with a focus on specific groups – to understand the help that is needed. And they showed clearly: it can be done.

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The Royal Foundation has selected six flagship locations across the UK...

Working with them to form Coalitions of committed organisations and people from their public, private and voluntary sectors all committed to the shared mission of demonstrating it is possible to end homelessness:

- Aberdeen
- Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole
- Lambeth
- Newport
- Northern Ireland
- Sheffield

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Each local Coalition has created their own Local Action Plan...

Detailing the support that will be given to groups of people who are experiencing, or at risk of, homelessness in that area – for example women, young people and single-parent families.

Each Local Action Plan will also set out where new groundwork will need to be laid to prevent homelessness. Encompassing a wide range of solutions – from housing to data to employment – the aim of the Local Action Plans is to make the prevention of homelessness ‘business as usual’.

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Through the Homewards Partnership, an unprecedented network of individuals and organisations, including top experts, and leading homelessness organisations, brought together by The Royal Foundation, have supported the Coalitions to develop the Local Action Plans. The Homewards Partnership will continue to support the organisations in the locations to deliver the Local Action Plans, galvanising national and international momentum.

Each Local Action Plan will be reviewed every six months...

To reflect on progress and capture new opportunities, activities in the Local Action Plans vary from testing new pilots that could be scaled, to fundamentally changing how people in their location work together to prevent homelessness.

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These are ambitious plans and we may find some elements need to be adjusted or updated as time goes on. Work may get completed and new ambitions set, or conditions beyond the Coalitions' control might change which fundamentally impact delivery of some activity. These plans are therefore agile documents, growing with our Coalitions to ensure they remain focused on working to deliver tangible change and maximum impact towards the shared mission of demonstrating it is possible to end homelessness – making it rare, brief and unrepeated.

‘By demonstrating what is working to prevent homelessness with these groups and across these key areas, Homewards will demonstrate it is possible to end homelessness, together.’

Homewards  
National Expert Panel



## The Royal Foundation will support each of our six flagship locations with...

### Additional Capacity

Homewards has provided each flagship location with a Local Delivery Lead, alongside project management and administrative support, to help drive the work forward and help the location to reach its goals.

### Seed Funding

We have set up the Homewards Fund, which provides up to £500,000 in seed funding to support the delivery of each Local Action Plan.

### Expertise

Homewards has convened the Homewards Partnership, which includes national businesses, global experts, leading sector organisations and many more. Their support includes hosting webinars that our Coalitions can join, to hear about best practice and get support.

### Changing the Narrative

Homewards will be leading on national campaigns, communications moments, and events to help drive conversation that will improve understanding of homelessness, encourage empathy towards those who experience it, and inspire optimism it can be ended. We will also set up local working groups to replicate this work in the locations, with the aim to deliver campaigns that will shine a light on the work being carried out – and which will engage the community through events and activities.

### Evaluation and Learning

Homewards is working with a research partner to help to share what is working, and to evaluate success. We will encourage peer to peer learning across our locations as well as prepare annual programme evaluation reports to show the impact of our Local Action Plans and a small number of thematic learning papers each year on key topics, to show what is working and help inspire other areas of the UK and beyond.

### Homes

Homewards is working with leading organisations in the sector, to help our flagship locations understand the types of homes they need – and to bring together the people and organisations that can deliver them.

### Funding and Finance

Using the convening power and platform of The Royal Foundation, Homewards will help the flagship locations to secure new sources of funding and investment.

### Employment

Regular work is an important way to prevent homelessness, Homewards will again deploy the convening power and platform of The Royal Foundation. Bringing together employers at both local and national level, we will unlock new or improved pathways to employment and training opportunities.

### Data

Homewards will convene experts; to help the flagship locations improve the way they use the data that is stored, with partners across the locations. Bringing together different information will help the Coalitions to understand who is at risk of homelessness and when – and to understand what services are proving the most effective.

### Early Intervention

Homewards is focused on prevention. To help the flagship locations pivot their approach to this, we will support them to test and deliver ideas that help people at the earliest point possible. Homewards will then look to show how other locations can deploy the approaches that are successful.

All the flagship locations have identified these as the areas where The Royal Foundation through Homewards can give the most valuable support, to help the Coalitions demonstrate that it is possible to end homelessness. The Royal Foundation is committed to this support and will continue to evaluate how we can best help our flagship locations throughout the programme.

## How has The Royal Foundation supported our six locations so far

The Royal Foundation has helped to leverage a number of significant commitments from local and national partners to support our six locations. These include:

### Creating more job opportunities for people with lived experience or at risk of homelessness

In September 2023, Pret A Manger committed - through Homewards - to expand their long-standing Rising Stars programme, which helps break the cycle of homelessness by providing support, training, and employment. Over the next five years it will support at least 500 people experiencing or at risk of homelessness into jobs at Pret's UK shops, including in Homewards locations where Pret has a presence.

### Helping to prevent family homelessness with private landlords

In March 2024, local Sheffield landlords pledged to support Homewards with a commitment to providing an initial thirty-three homes to house families at risk of, or experiencing, homelessness in the city. They are working with Homewards to develop a package of support for both tenants and landlords to help to improve tenancy sustainment.

### Recognising the tireless work of the homelessness workforce

Blue Light Card, the nation's leading discount provider for the emergency services, NHS, social care sector and armed forces, have extended its membership to include the homelessness workforce. The commitment supports an estimated 60,000 people in the UK homelessness workforce, which includes housing officers, night shelter managers, outreach workers and many more and gives them discounts to groceries, entertainment, and utilities. This partnership helps to raise awareness of the work that the workforce does and the essential role they play in supporting the social care sector.

‘Homewards has the right approach. They have brought a range of new players to the table, to focus minds on what it takes to prevent homelessness from happening in the first place.

It has been exciting, and unprecedented, to see these six coalitions come together to focus on delivering on that goal.’

Matt Downie, CEO, Crisis



## Homewards in Northern Ireland: Executive Summary

Each of the Coalitions in the six Homewards flagship locations have created a Local Action Plan. This plan will be reviewed every six months and will adapt and change according to the needs of the locations.

For Homewards Northern Ireland, we have set out:

1. The initial groups of people that the local Homewards Coalition will support
2. The actions to be taken by organisations in the local Coalition over the next 12 months and beyond
3. How we will know what has been successful / Our success indicators

This Local Action Plan has built on existing, meaningful work and strong relationships as reflected in the Northern Ireland Housing Executive's Homelessness Strategy 2022-27 Ending Homelessness Together, the recently published (draft) Northern Ireland Executive Programme for Government and the Life Deserved Strategy: 'Caring' for Children and Young People in Northern Ireland from the Department for Education and Health.

There is a huge amount of meaningful work taking place which is in the draft Programme for Governments, with a

specific focus to 'embed permanent systems change to prevent homelessness for young people coming out of care' and 'a pilot programme that will support young people leaving care and prevent this group from the risk of homelessness.' This shows there is a huge amount of local momentum that Homewards can contribute to, including via a range of committed statutory and voluntary sector partners.

'A focus on prevention, backed by the new partners Homewards has brought to the table, will put these locations on a path to ending homelessness.'

Professor Peter Mackie  
Cardiff University

For Homewards NI, it is the beginning of a long road of activity for Northern Ireland but signals an approach with prevention and collaboration at its heart.

The number of people experiencing homelessness in Northern Ireland may take a number of years to begin to decrease, while Homewards NI action takes effect. The local Coalition will measure success in several ways – as set out in more detail in the following pages – to ensure we know what is working.

## Groups where Homewards can help the most

In Northern Ireland, the number of people experiencing or at risk of homelessness is continuing to rise. Groups Homewards NI have identified as most in need of support include women experiencing chronic homelessness and young people leaving care.

In Northern Ireland chronic homelessness is understood as individuals with very pronounced and complex support needs who found it difficult to exit from homelessness. The numbers of young people in the care system in Northern Ireland are at an increasingly high level, and research shows that people with care experience are more likely to experience homelessness at some point in their lives. At the same time, over 250 women are experiencing chronic homelessness.

Homewards NI can make a real difference to the lives of young people leaving care and women experiencing chronic homelessness by pursuing an approach that has collaboration and a focus on prevention at its heart; that uses Homewards' unique convening power to bring together new and existing partners to collaborate; that increases the number of homes people can afford; and that generates partnerships, particularly with the private sector, to create opportunities to help prevent people being pushed into homelessness.

These are the initial focus areas for the Homewards NI Action Plan. They will evolve and develop over time, including other groups or to put in place the groundwork needed to prevent homelessness that has been identified or agreed to be a priority. This could include how homelessness impacts rural communities, for example, or where solutions being generated across the other Homewards locations could be applied in Northern Ireland.

Against each of the Action Plan sections in the following pages, Homewards NI has identified specific signs of success, which will tell us that our activities are leading to change.

## Actions to be taken over the next 12 months and beyond

This plan has been developed through collaboration across the community. It aims to complement and support the delivery of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive's Homelessness Strategy 2022-27 Ending Homelessness Together, as well as the recently published (draft) Northern Ireland Executive Programme for Government. Homewards is focused on adding value to this existing activity. Homewards NI recognises that there is a real opportunity to improve collaboration, and to focus on preventing homelessness. This can potentially make a real difference and a wider impact across Northern Ireland.

Homewards NI plans to lay new groundwork – and make a lasting impact – in two specific ways:

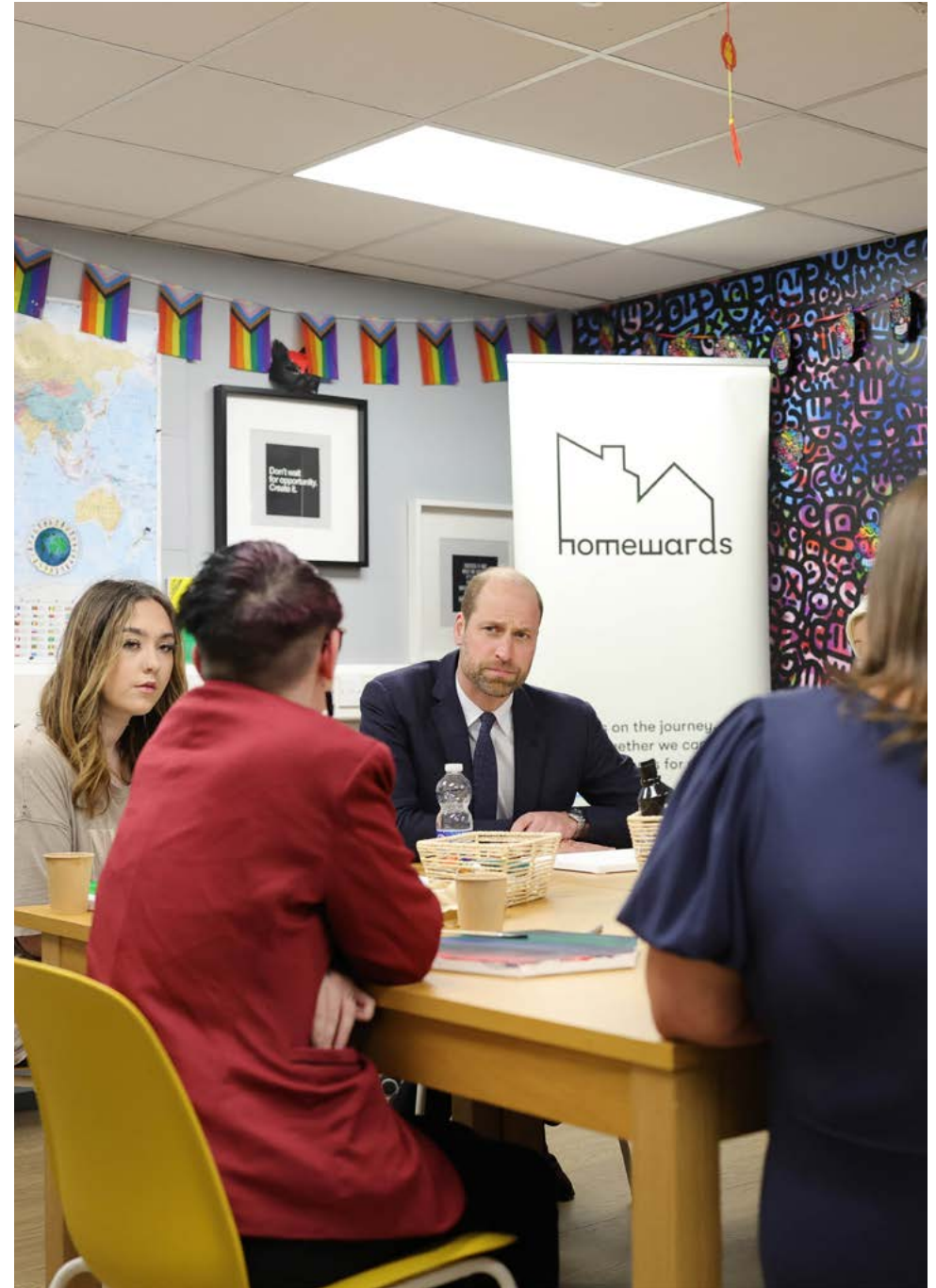
1. Prevention of homelessness for young people leaving care (young people with care experience)
2. Prevention of homelessness for women experiencing chronic homelessness

More detail on each of these areas is set out in the following pages.

## How we will know what has been successful / our success indicators

Homewards NI has set the following indicators of success (to be assessed at yearly intervals):

- We will have brought together new and existing partners to create sustainable ways of working, which in turn have helped to (1) make more homes available; (2) create more opportunities for those experiencing or at risk of homelessness; and (3) ensure that those at risk of, or on the brink of, homelessness got the preventative support they needed at the right time.
- We will have delivered successful projects, or tested innovative approaches, that prevented people from experiencing homelessness.
- We will have built local understanding around homelessness and encouraged empathy towards those locally who are experiencing homelessness, through local campaigns and putting lived experience at the heart of everything we do.
- By sharing what works, we will also have generated optimism that homelessness can be ended, which will be evident through greater community engagement and improved local public perceptions.
- We will have laid the groundwork needed to grow these successful projects across Northern Ireland, so that they can help more people (specifically other groups who are at a higher risk of homelessness).





# 1. Prevention of homelessness for young people leaving care

## Local context

Across the UK, it is estimated that 25% of the homeless population have been in care, and that one-third of those leaving care will experience homelessness within the first two years.

United Kingdom  
homeless population  
that has been in care

25%

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**‘We might have a job, a house etc. but that does not mean we are not struggling. Check in to help us resolve small problems before they get bigger.’**

Comments from young people,  
The National Leaving Care  
Benchmarking Forum

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As statutory care responsibilities can end when a young person turns 18, there are examples of people with care experience becoming homeless on their 18th birthday. Once a young person experiences homelessness, it can have a lasting impact and increases the likelihood that they will be at greater risk of repeat homelessness.

However, there are examples showing that, by working directly with young people leaving care and providing support to meet their needs, we can prevent them from experiencing homelessness. In Northern Ireland, approximately 140 young people each year leave care and present as homeless. This is a minority of those leaving care – we need to better understand why this is happening, and what can be done to prevent it.

Homewards NI has a chance to shine a light on what is working, expanding these and other services whilst sharing learning across the Homewards locations and beyond.

## What are we going to do over the next 12 months?

### 1.1 Innovative housing project

Each flagship location is developing an innovative housing project, which will test new ways to unlock homes at scale. Homewards NI's innovative housing project is focused on young people leaving care.

Who is leading this work? The Northern Ireland Housing Executive and The Royal Foundation

### 1.2 Learning from lived experience

Homewards NI will bring together young people leaving care who are experiencing (or with lived experience of) homelessness to better understand what support they need and when. This will help to develop and resource a consistent way of working with young people leaving care with experience of homelessness across Northern Ireland. It will build on established frameworks and practice and improve the way services offer support to make them more effective, thereby helping to prevent and reduce homelessness.

Who is leading this work? Lived Experience working group

### 1.3 Data gathering

Homewards NI will work with partners including the Centre for Homelessness Impact and the Northern Ireland Housing Executive to bring together data and other information from across the country to better understand the scale of the issue. Why are young people leaving care across Northern Ireland becoming homeless, and what help could prevent it from happening?

Who is leading this work? The Northern Ireland Housing Executive and the Centre for Homelessness Impact

### 1.4 Identifying best practice

Using the information gathered, Homewards NI will identify examples of best practice and lessons learned from other jurisdictions. These can then be adopted in Northern Ireland and/or applied when supporting young people leaving care.

Who is leading this work? The Royal Foundation and statutory partners

### 1.5 Education, training and employment for young people leaving care

Once best practice examples are identified, Homewards NI will work with the New Foundations statutory sector working group to contribute and grow the local offer for young people leaving care that they can access independently, through support services or statutory agencies that will strengthen existing pathways and create new opportunities to access education, training and employment as well as support to develop life skills including cooking, sustaining a tenancy and support with managing finances.

Who is leading this work? The Royal Foundation and PwC

### 1.6 Supporting investment in new homes

Using the convening power of The Royal Foundation, Homewards NI will bring together a range of potential funders, investors and partners who may be

interested in funding or providing resources to support the availability of homes for young people with care experience in Northern Ireland.

Who is leading this work? The Royal Foundation

What are we going to do over the next four years?

### 1.7 Provision of furnishings

Homewards NI will support young people leaving care to sustain a tenancy or settled accommodation, by making a house a home through the provision of furnishings and other items. This will complement existing work in this area, such as the Home Starter Pack and furniture service by Homeless Connect.

Who is leading this work? The Royal Foundation

### 1.8 Early-stage intervention

Homewards NI are committed to supporting statutory partners with the implementation of systems change which will prevent homelessness for young people leaving care. This will include support with the delivery of the New Foundations Action Plan.

Who is leading this work? Statutory partners, including the Department of Health and the Northern Ireland Housing Executive

## Signs of success

These activities will contribute to the following signs of success

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### 1.1 Innovative housing project

#### 1.6 Supporting the delivery of new homes

#### 1.7 Provision of furnishings

Homewards unlocks funding and investment opportunities to support delivery of homes (or housing options that are safe, secure and suitable) for young people leaving care in Northern Ireland.

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### 1.2 Learning from lived experience

Young people who have experienced homelessness help to shape decisions about how to prevent homelessness for young people leaving care in Northern Ireland.

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### 1.3 Data gathering

#### 1.4 Identifying best practice

Evidence about preventing homelessness for young people is used to contribute and grow the local offer for young people leaving care.

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### 1.5 Education, training and employment for young people leaving care

More education, training, and employment opportunities for young people leaving care in Northern Ireland.

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### 1.8 Early-stage intervention

Projects to prevent homelessness for young people leaving care tested in Northern Ireland. Homewards NI, alongside partners, identifies what is needed to roll successful projects out further.

## Key partners

Young people who have been through the care system.

A range of statutory partners, including the Northern Ireland Housing Executive and the Department of Health.

Those who support young people at risk of homelessness including:

- Action for Children
- Barnardo's
- Centre for Homelessness Impact
- Homeless Connect
- Housing Rights
- IKEA
- Include Youth
- MACS Supporting Children and Young People
- PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC)
- The Northern Ireland Children's Commissioner
- The Northern Ireland Youth Forum
- The Simon Community
- Voice of Young People In Care (VOYPIC)

## 2. Prevention of homelessness for women experiencing chronic homelessness

Local context

# 250

Northern Ireland  
women in chronic  
homelessness

There are around 250 women in chronic homeless each year in Northern Ireland. Homelessness can present additional challenges for women who report additional stigma of how they will be perceived, as well as the fear of losing current or future access to children.



**‘Simon Community have noted a growing number of women using their support services. During 2020-21, 301 females were supported in Simon Community accommodation projects; 48% were under 25 years of age.’**

**‘Access to Healthcare for Women Experiencing Homelessness’, Simon Community Report, 2024**

**This can mean some women only seek assistance when they see no alternative. The impact of this can be that women are more likely to be part of the hidden homeless’ population and less visible to support services. Women are also more likely to rely on informal and often unsuitable support networks to prevent homelessness.**

In Northern Ireland chronic homelessness is understood as ‘individuals with very pronounced and complex support needs who find it difficult to exit from homelessness’.

Women experiencing chronic homelessness have historically struggled to access and engage with the right support at the right time. The Belfast Complex Lives model is focused on supporting men and women who share this experience and is making great progress in creating the conditions for collaboration and wider systems change. This provides a foundation for Homewards NI to build on, and to develop further learning.

Homewards NI will develop a working group to support women at risk of or with experience of chronic homelessness. The working group will bring together key stakeholders in this area, alongside people with lived experience, to review the support that is available and identify opportunities for improvement. Broader issues affecting this group – including family dynamics, mental health, and addiction – will also be considered, as will the provision of suitable homes in locations that are appropriate to meet their needs.

## What are we going to do over the next 12 months?

### 2.1 Working group on women experiencing chronic homelessness

Homewards NI will create a working group that will bring together key local and national partners, as well as experts on women's homelessness, to share what is working to prevent and end chronic female homelessness. This work will highlight best practice, and develop practical solutions with a focus on prevention, which can be delivered by the public, voluntary and private sectors.

Who is leading this work? Homewards Local Delivery Lead for Northern Ireland

### 2.2 Evidence and data review

Homewards NI will review evidence, data and research to understand the journey of women into homelessness in Northern Ireland. This includes better understanding the root causes, and the unique challenges faced by women who are experiencing, or who are at risk of, homelessness. This will build upon the existing local knowledge and expertise in this area.

Who is leading this work? Centre for Homelessness Impact and Northern Ireland Housing Executive working group and Women experiencing chronic homelessness working group

### 2.3 Identifying opportunities to help

Working with the organisations and services involved in a woman's journey towards homelessness, Homewards NI will identify gaps in provision. Homewards NI will also look at opportunities to intervene

at an earlier stage, which could help prevent women from becoming homeless. We will then work with services to address these opportunities.

Who is leading this work? Women experiencing chronic homelessness Working Group

### 2.4 Supporting investment in new homes

Using the convening power of The Royal Foundation, Homewards NI will bring together a range of potential funders, investors and partners who may be interested in funding or providing resources to support the availability of homes for women experiencing chronic homelessness in Northern Ireland.

Who is leading this work? The Royal Foundation

What are we going to do over the next four years?

### 2.5 Learning from lived experience – employment

Homewards NI will bring women experiencing (or with lived experience of) chronic homelessness together with local businesses, to understand the barriers and challenges that women face for employment. The aim is to strengthen and create new job opportunities for women (including apprenticeships, bursaries, and mentoring). Homewards NI will also help the employers to put the right support in place, to ensure that women on the brink of homelessness can sustain their employment

– and to help women experiencing chronic homelessness to get into employment and training.

Who is leading this work? PwC and The Royal Foundations Homewards Local Delivery Lead for Northern Ireland

### 2.6 Learning from lived experience – services and support

Homewards NI will bring together women experiencing (or with lived experience of) chronic homelessness to better understand what support they need and when. This will help to develop and resource a consistent way of working with women with experience of chronic homelessness across Northern Ireland. It will build on established frameworks and practice and improve the way services offer support to make them more effective, thereby helping to prevent and reduce homelessness.

Who is leading this work? Lived Experience working group

### Key partners

Women with lived experience or living experience of being at risk of chronic homelessness

Those who support women at risk of chronic homelessness including:

- Centre for Homelessness Impact
- DePaul
- East Belfast Mission
- Extern
- First Housing
- Health and Social Care Trusts
- Homeless Connect
- Housing Rights
- The Belfast Complex Lives Model
- The Department for Communities
- The Department of Health
- The Department of Justice
- The Northern Ireland Housing Executive
- The Salvation Army
- The Simon Community
- The Welcome Organisation
- Women's Aid

## Signs of success

These activities will contribute to the following signs of success

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**2.1 Working group on women experiencing chronic homelessness**

**2.2 Evidence and data review**

**2.3 Identifying opportunities to help Homewards NI will enable a coordinated response focused on prevention, by engaging organisations and services that are involved in a woman's journey into homelessness and sharing best practice.**

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**2.2 Evidence and data review**

**Approach to using data to prevent chronic homelessness for women tested in Northern Ireland.**

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**2.4 Supporting the delivery of new homes**

**Homewards unlocks funding and investment opportunities to support delivery of homes (or housing options that are safe, secure and suitable) in Northern Ireland.**

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**2.5 Learning from lived experience – employment**

**More education, training and employment opportunities for women who are at risk of chronic homelessness.**

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**2.4 Supporting the delivery of new homes**

**2.5 Learning from lived experience – employment**

**2.6 Learning from lived experience – services**

**Women who have experienced homelessness help to shape decisions about how to prevent chronic homelessness for women in Northern Ireland.**



## Get in touch

If you are a business or organisation that wants to find out more about working with Homewards, please contact [homewards@royalfoundation.com](mailto:homewards@royalfoundation.com) and one of the team will be in touch.

For more information on homelessness across England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, please visit the following link: [homewards.org.uk/help-resources/](https://homewards.org.uk/help-resources/)

## Source list

Information in this Action Plan is based on data collected by The Northern Ireland Housing Executive about people who are experiencing or at risk of homelessness, as well as the following sources:

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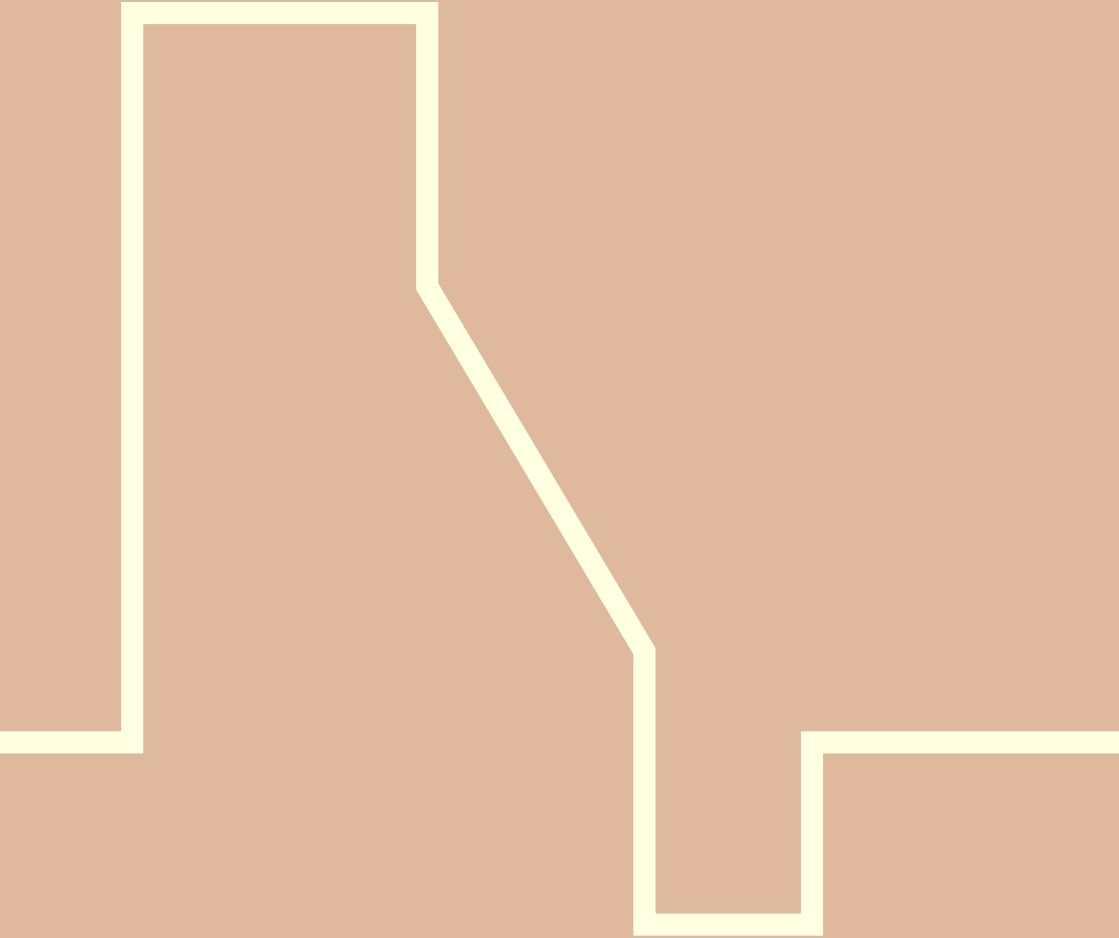
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OF WALES