

when everyone has a **home**

People, prevention and partnership

Strategic plan
2024-2029

Experts by experience: how you helped shape our plan



**Housing
Rights**

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We are Housing Rights

Housing Rights is a charity that helps people in Northern Ireland live in safe, suitable, and affordable homes.

We operate a housing helpline, to help with housing problems. Our advisers are available by phone, 028 9024 5640, and online chat from Monday to Friday 9:30am to 4:30pm. You may get a caseworker if your issue needs more expertise and work.

We can help with:

- homelessness
- social tenancies
- private rentals
- mortgage and rent arrears
- repossession and court

We also help and support other people who work in housing or advice so that they have the information and training they need to help people with their housing problems. We work to ensure that people in government make the right decisions about housing and homelessness. We make sure they are aware of the housing problems people face and that experts by experience are involved in the decisions.

Why we involve experts by experience

Experts by experience are people who have first-hand experience of housing problems or homelessness. Their expertise and insights are crucial in preventing and ending homelessness. When we're making decisions about what to prioritise in our work, and how best to support people, experts by experience help us to get it right. They make sure that our services meet the needs of the people we want to help.

We believe it's crucial that people who make decisions about housing and homelessness listen to the expertise and insights of experts by experience to ensure they make the right decisions about housing and homelessness. This is why we support experts by experience to influence the government's decisions.

Thanks for helping shape our new plan

At Housing Rights, we believe that everyone should have a home. We've made a new 5-year plan to help us get closer to this vision.

We know that achieving our vision of when everyone has a home has become harder. For many people, especially people on lower incomes, it is harder to find and keep a home that meets their needs.

Poverty has increased. Housing conditions, while improved overall, often still cause problems for people's health and wellbeing. And the law and policy which should help ensure everyone has a home, needs improvement.

We knew that our plan would be better if we asked experts by experience to help us make sure our plan meets the needs of the people we want to help. 50 experts by experience got involved and brought a wide range of experience. Some of them knew about us, and had used our services, others had not. They included people:

- living in cities and people living rurally
- under 25 and older people of pension age
- from Northern Ireland and other countries, including people with refugee status
- with different housing experiences including private and social renters and people experiencing homelessness
- in circumstances that make them especially vulnerable to homelessness, such as people in or leaving prison

We are grateful for the expertise and insights each of you brought and hope this document will show how you shaped our plan.

We look forward to continuing to involve experts by experience in our work in the years ahead.



Rose Crozier
Chair, Housing Rights board



Kate McCauley
Chief Executive Officer

What we asked you

We asked you to think about four key questions:

1. What does home mean to you?
2. What will be the main housing challenges in Northern Ireland over the next five years?
3. How do you get the help you need?
4. How can Housing Rights better involve experts by experience in our work?

Here is what you told us and what is in our new plan....

What home means to you

These are some of the words experts by experience used during workshops to describe 'home':

peace
comfort Choice
family independence
I have never had a home
Ability to be a parent safe security
I have not had a home since I was age 15
Places where I have been staying are not home
It is not a home if there is a threat that I might have to leave it at any time
We feel sad because we have a daughter with autism and our house does not meet her needs
Home just means my hometown, I don't have a house
Home is a safety net, love, my everything, where I can be myself
Somewhere that lets you be you
My house is not a home
Home is where love is
safety Affordable Freedom
love Relaxing

What does home mean to you?

What you told us

The most common words used to describe what home means were:

- safety
- family
- belonging
- comfort
- peace
- security
- love

"Home is the foundation of everything"

"Home is as important as food and water."

"Home for me is everything"

Everyone agreed how essential a home is:

Some of you also explained that having a house does not necessarily mean having a home:

"It is not a home if there is a threat that I might have to leave it at any time."

"Places where I have been staying are not home. I have not had a home since I was age 15"

In our plan, we will...

In our plan, we have kept the focus on a home being the starting block for everything else in life.

Your insights and emphasis on how essential it is to have a home have encouraged us to keep driving our work towards our vision: when everyone has a home.

What will be the main housing challenges in Northern Ireland over the next five years?

What you told us

The biggest challenge identified was the lack of social housing and the need to build more homes.

Another big challenge is the cost of living crisis and people not being able to afford their rent. Other key challenges are poor standards, issues with repairs, lack of protection for private renters and difficulties getting somewhere to rent.

The experts by experience we spoke to in Hydebank Wood College identified extra challenges that lead to homelessness, including lack of support for:

- young people leaving care
- women experiencing domestic abuse
- people with addictions
- people facing paramilitary threats

In our plan, we will...

In our plan, three of our key goals are to ensure that:

1. People live in good quality, affordable, sustainable homes that meet their needs
2. If people become homeless, it's for a short period, and it does not happen again
3. People get the help they need at the right time, in a way that best meets their needs

We will work towards these goals by continuing to:

- provide free advice to people experiencing housing problems or homelessness to make sure they are informed and empowered to make decisions which affect their homes
- support people experiencing housing problems or homelessness to express their views and stand up for their rights
- influence politicians, government, and organisations like the Housing Executive to address the big challenges identified, including building more social homes, increasing housing benefits and strengthening the law to protect private renters

How do you get the help you need?

What you told us

Many of you told us that you did not know where to go for help with housing problems and that you normally ask for help from organisations you already know, or friends and family.

We asked if you feel comfortable phoning an organisation to ask for advice. Half of you told us you do feel comfortable phoning, explaining that a phone call is a good way to get information. The other half explained you do not feel comfortable phoning for advice, for example, due to anxiety, language barriers or feeling overwhelmed.

We asked whether you prefer to ask for help online, for example, using live chat or by email, rather than phoning or going to an organisation in person. The majority of you said you did not feel comfortable asking for help online and that you prefer to get help face-to-face. However, a quarter of you said you prefer to ask for help online.

It was clear that everyone has different perspectives, needs and comfort zones when it comes to asking for help and advice.

In our plan, we will...

One of the key goals in our plan is to make sure people have the help they need at the right time, in a way that best meets their needs. Your insights that different people feel comfortable getting help in different ways, helped us decide that our services should remain available by phone, face-to-face and online.

We want to make sure people know where to get housing help. We're committed to doing more work that reaches beyond our offices. We'll continue to work in courts, in prisons, within communities, and in partnership with other organisations people go to for help. Our plan also includes a commitment to innovation by trying new ways to help people. We'll make sure that as people's needs change, the way we help people changes too.

How can Housing Rights better involve experts by experience in our work?

What you told us

You told us how important it is to involve experts by experience in making decisions about housing and homelessness. People with first-hand experience of housing problems and homelessness know what needs to change, and how to help others in the same situation.

There were many reasons why you told us you would want to get involved in our work such as the chance to help others and meet people in the same boat, having your voice heard and influencing change.

We also asked what would put you off getting involved. You told us that you've been put off getting involved in other projects because:

- you were not listened to
- you did not see anything change

You told us about barriers to getting involved, including:

- stigma linked to homelessness
- childcare and transport issues
- a lack of confidence



'Don't listen to what I have to say and then throw it away'.

You gave us lots of ideas about how we can better involve experts by experience in what we do, such as:

- setting up expert by experience steering groups for our projects
- inviting experts by experience to join meetings with politicians
- involving more experts by experience in delivering our services
- giving people different options for ways to get involved
- partnering with other organisations working with experts by experience
- ensuring participation is accessible to everyone, including people with language barriers or people living rurally

How can Housing Rights better involve experts by experience in our work?

In our plan, we will...

A key goal in our plan is to support experts by experience to be meaningfully involved in decisions that affect them. We'll do this by:

- supporting experts by experience to influence decisions made about housing by politicians, government and organisations such as the Housing Executive
- calling for the way decisions about housing are made to change so that experts by experience are meaningfully involved from the beginning
- involving experts by experience in how we design and deliver our services

Thanks again for sharing your insights and expertise to help shape our new 5-year plan. You can read the full plan [here](#).

If you have any questions or would like to get more involved in our work, get in touch with our team by emailing: participation@housingrights.org.uk

Housing Rights

028 9024 5640

www.housingrights.org.uk

info@housingrights.org.uk

  @HousingRightsNI  @HousingRights

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