

Think piece

Homelessness – the housing first model

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Summary

- There has been a sharp increase in homelessness in Jersey.
- There are structural, personal and social drivers of homelessness.
- Organisations supporting homeless people are working to capacity.
- The Jersey Homelessness Strategy has eight priorities: statutory definition and regular data, an advice centre, structured support, more accommodation, increased housing supply, prevention, effective governance, and stronger accountability.
- The Housing First approach provides immediate, unconditional permanent housing, accompanied by flexible, wraparound support.

Introduction

Homelessness in Jersey is a multifaceted social challenge, affecting individuals from across the community. Many islanders may be shocked to learn that approximately 30% of homeless people in Jersey are in full or part-time employment. The scope of the issue extends beyond visible rough sleeping to include those living in temporary accommodation, facing eviction, or experiencing housing insecurity. This paper outlines the current situation, summarises key government and third-sector data, analyses the main policy challenges and considers a policy option to move to Housing First.

Defining Homelessness

Jersey's official definition, updated in 2020, adopts a four-tier typology based on the European ETHOS framework (homelessness.je):

- Rooflessness: Individuals without shelter (e.g., rough sleeping).
- Houselessness: Those living in shelters or temporary accommodation.
- Insecure housing: People at risk of eviction, experiencing domestic violence, or unable to remain in their current accommodation.
- Inadequate housing: Those in severely substandard, overcrowded, or unsafe conditions.

Quarterly official data collection began in 2024 and is overseen by the Jersey Homelessness Strategic Board.

Key Trends and Statistics

- Sharp increases: In Q2 2025, 341 people sought support for homelessness: a 67% year-on-year rise ([Government of Jersey](#)).
- Temporary accommodation: 194 people were housed in emergency shelters; Shelter Trust operates near full capacity with 117 beds ([Shelter Trust](#)).
- Rough sleeping: Remains low, with eight people recorded as roofless (Q2 2025), due in part to proactive outreach.
- Youth homelessness: 52 young people under 25 sought help in Q2 2025; transition and family breakdown were key triggers ([JAYF](#)).
- Demographics: 73% of homeless clients are male.
- Employment: Approximately 30% of homeless people are in full or part-time employment ([Homelessness in Jersey Q2 report 2025](#)).
- 18% of homeless people are recent ex-prisoners.
- 46% of prisoners leaving La Moye are released into temporary housing such as shelters and guest houses which adversely affects their rehabilitation and increases the risk of reoffending ([Bailiwick Express](#)).
- Social housing: The [Affordable Housing Gateway](#) had 649 people waiting in October 2025. More than half of social tenants struggle

with housing costs; the average one-bedroom rent is around £1,118 per month.

Causes of Homelessness

Structural Drivers:

- High rents and housing scarcity: Over 30% of local households face 'rental stress,' spending more than a third of income on housing ([Government of Jersey](#)).
- Eviction risk and insecure tenancy: Limited tenant protections and short notice periods increase vulnerability.
- Qualification restrictions: Jersey's rules limit access to the rental market, particularly for those with less than ten years' residence.

Personal and Social Drivers:

- Domestic abuse: The primary driver for women using emergency accommodation ([FREEDA](#)).
- Substance abuse, mental health: Commonly cited in case assessments, especially for men ([Government of Jersey](#)).
- Relationship breakdown: A frequent cause for young people ([JAYF](#)).

Service Provision and System Capacity

- Emergency and temporary shelter: Provided by The Shelter Trust (adults), FREEDA (women and children), Sanctuary Trust (men), and JAYF (youth).
- Housing Advice Service: Offers triage, personal housing plans, and coordinated interventions for at-risk residents ([homelessness.je](#)).
- Outreach and support: Regular engagement with rough sleepers and those in insecure housing, helping transitions to emergency shelter (Shelter Trust).
- Capacity constraints: Most services operate at or near full capacity. Delayed access to move-on accommodation, especially for domestic abuse survivors or those with complex needs, creates bottlenecks and sometimes leads to people being turned away ([Government of Jersey](#)).

Current Strategy and Policy Framework

The [Jersey Homelessness Strategy](#) (Jan 2022) set out eight priorities: statutory definition and regular data, an advice centre, structured support, more accommodation, increased housing supply, prevention, effective governance, and stronger accountability. Highlights to date include:

- The introduction of quarterly official reporting.
- Creation of a [Housing Advice Service](#).
- Specialist support pathways for high-risk groups.

A new policy direction for Jersey? Housing First

What is Housing First?

Housing First is a globally recognised approach to homelessness ([Homelessness in Europe: FEANTSA](#)). Unlike traditional models, which often require people to jump through metaphorical hoops such as dealing with a drug addiction before accessing housing, Housing First provides immediate, unconditional permanent housing, accompanied by flexible, wraparound support. Core principles include:

- Housing as a human right.
- Person-centred, flexible support.
- No requirement to engage in treatment before housing is offered.
- Permanent housing as the base for recovery and reintegration.

Where Housing First Originated

The Housing First model began in New York City during the 1990s, pioneered by Dr. Sam Tsemberis and Pathways to Housing. It replaced the "treatment first" model with one offering immediate access to housing plus tailored support.

Examples of Successful Housing First Implementation:

- Finland: Defaulted to Housing First, nearly eradicating rough sleeping through unconditional housing and sustained support.
- United States: The original New York programme maintained 88% housing retention; Massachusetts and San Diego also improved housing outcomes and reduced public costs.
- Canada: The At Home/Chez Soi project showed the approach could be scaled and informed federal policy.
- Elsewhere: Successful adaptation in Denmark, Norway, Brno (Czech Republic), New Zealand, Brazil, France, and Spain.

Housing First in the UK

Housing First has been piloted and expanded in Greater Manchester, Liverpool City Region, and the West Midlands, with strong tenancy sustainment and government investment. Scotland and Wales have adopted versions as part of "rapid rehousing." London and Newcastle have effective programs led by [Crisis](#), focusing on high-need populations.

Why hasn't it been adopted everywhere?

While the Housing First approach can be effective, it faces several significant challenges:

1. Resource Limits: Many areas struggle with a lack of affordable housing and the necessary support services to help individuals succeed.
2. Political Will: Ongoing investment in both housing and social services is crucial, and when it falls short the most vulnerable suffer.
3. Systemic Issues: The success of Housing First relies on a multi-agency person-centred approach.

4. Stigma and Misperceptions: There is still a lot of social and political pushback against the idea of providing housing without requiring certain conditions to be met first.

5. Implementation Issues: If support services are not properly executed or followed through, it can undermine the successful implementation.

Are there any criticisms of Housing First?

Critics argue that Housing First may not sufficiently address root causes like chronic mental health issues or substance misuse. Concerns also exist about its effectiveness in areas with limited affordable housing and the long-term sustainability of funding.

Key Factors for Success in Jersey

For Housing First to work effectively in Jersey, several factors must be addressed:

- Sustained supply of affordable housing: increasing the supply of affordable, stable social housing is critical.
- Integrated and adequately funded support services: housing must be paired with wraparound health, mental health, substance misuse, and social support.
- Strong coordination and governance: clear leadership and cross-agency working are vital.
- Policy and legal reform: changes in eligibility for social housing and simplified referral pathways may be necessary.
- Community and stakeholder buy-in: addressing stigma and misunderstanding is essential.
- Sufficient funding and political will: multi-year, ring-fenced funding is needed.
- Monitoring, evaluation, and iteration: continuous evaluation ensures services can be adapted to Jersey's needs.

Changes Required for Jersey

- A policy decision to switch to Housing First.
- Permanent, appropriate housing supply: moving from short-term/emergency provision to sustainable, affordable homes with attached support.
- Cross-agency coordination: integrated support blending health, mental health, substance abuse, and social work in a single client-centred pathway.
- Outcome focus: prioritising stable rehousing and long-term tenancy sustainment.
- Funding stability: ongoing funding to underpin support and housing provision.

Conclusion

Homelessness in Jersey is a systemic problem rooted in both housing market pressures and wider social factors. We will always need immediate

provision for those in crisis but implementing a Housing First model would bring Jersey into line with best international practice and offer sustainable solutions for residents experiencing homelessness.

Biographical note

Jennifer Bridge MBE is an accomplished Chair with extensive experience across the creative arts, third sector, and political spheres.

Jennifer contributes regularly to public discourse through her columns and articles in local media, focusing on inclusion and open government.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, she completed postgraduate studies in research methodologies, which has enhanced her evidence-based approach to public commentary.

Jennifer is a co-organiser of Jersey repair café - a community group where volunteers fix broken items like clothes, electronics, and bikes for free, promoting sustainability and reducing waste.