10 Years at Housing Matters: A Conversation with Harriet Goodland

This week marks a significant milestone for Housing Matters' Advice Service Lead, Harriet Goodland, who celebrates ten years with the organisation, beginning as a volunteer and progressing to lead a team of seven advisers supporting people across Bristol facing housing crisis and homelessness.



Alice Tibbert, CEO, sat down with Harriet to reflect on how far the service has come, the challenges faced along the way, and the people who have left a lasting impression.

Harriet, this week you celebrate 10 years with Housing Matters – one year volunteering and nine years as an adviser. Can you start by telling us a bit about your earliest memories of the organisation?

H: It feels like a lifetime ago. We were based in a very small office connected to a church on Old Market. Everything was paper files, and we had a voicemail system on a tape that we had to rewind every morning to listen to messages.

We had one shared email address, one phone number, and no laptops or desktops. It's completely different now – we're practically paperless! It really does feel like a different world.

What are some standout moments from the past 10 years - things you're particularly proud of, or even some of the biggest challenges?

H: I'm proud of how the team has grown. When I started, there were just two advisers, and now we're a team of seven – that feels like a huge achievement. We've gone from supporting a few hundred people, to this past year working on 1,200 cases!

I'm also really proud of the rebrand to Housing Matters and how positively it's been received by the community, our partners, and colleagues.

In terms of challenges, the office fire at the church (in January 2020) stands out. It forced us to move temporarily, and we ended up relocating permanently - we never went back to those tiny rooms. Shortly followed of course by a worldwide pandemic, which was a huge challenge. We had to get laptops and mobile phones set up for everyone almost overnight so we could continue supporting clients. The world changed overnight, and so did the way we work!

We know you've worked on thousands of cases over the years. Are there any that have stayed with you?

H: Yes, definitely. I often think about an elderly couple I helped move into a new flat. They had an adult daughter with disabilities, and after they moved, they were so grateful - they even gave me gifts and kept in touch.

They had lots of follow-up questions about things like recycling and who their MP was, so it was really nice to continue supporting them beyond the move.

Another case I think about is a refugee family we helped into emergency accommodation and then eventually into social housing. They felt like they had no options before they found us.

Their two children were approaching exam age, and they were so committed to their education - it was really important to get them into a stable environment. That case felt especially meaningful.

We know the housing landscape in Bristol has changed significantly. What patterns have you noticed over the last decade?

H: The landscape has changed hugely. A big shift happened during COVID in 2020 and 2021. We started hearing from people we might not typically expect - professionals who had never needed advice services before but suddenly couldn't afford their rent or find a new place to live.

That felt like a real turning point.

We've also seen important developments more recently like the Renters' Rights Act, which feels like a real step forward in improving security and conditions for tenants.

Overall, demand has increased significantly. We were always busy when there were just two of us, but now, if we were still that size, it would be completely overwhelming. Even as the team grows, demand continues to rise year on year.

You've progressed from volunteer to Adviser to Advice Service Lead, now managing a team of seven. We regularly hear incredibly positive feedback about the team - from clients and partners alike. How does it feel to lead a team like that?

H: I feel really humbled by it. I don't always get the chance to look at every case, but when I do - whether through file reviews or feedback - it reminds me just how amazing the team is.

We're really lucky to have such dedicated, knowledgeable, and experienced people. Everyone supports each other - no one is working in isolation or just focused on their own cases. People are always willing to step in and help.

If someone is off on leave, you know their clients are in safe hands. That level of teamwork is really special.

Is there anything you'd like to say to the Housing Matters team and perhaps something you'd like to say to the city of Bristol as well?

H: To the team - I just can't thank you enough. It's an amazing group of people, and I feel privileged to work alongside people who care so much about what they do. I wouldn't want to change anything about the team.

And to the city - Housing Matters has been here for 60 years, and we may be needed for many more. We're not going anywhere. We're going to keep supporting our clients and doing everything we can to improve the housing situation in Bristol, step by step.

From the team at Housing Matters (past and present) we want to say a massive thank you to Harriet for her incredible 10 years of dedicated service, the work she has done and continues to do for our clients and the communities of Bristol is transformational.

She has been pivotal to the organisations incredible development and success over the years. Thank you for all you do.

- **Alice Tibbert, CEO, Housing Matters**