Homelessness prevention in Newcastle: Examining the role of the 'local state' in the context of austerity and welfare reforms

Full report

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Acronyms

AIN	Active Inclusion Newcastle
ALMO	Arms Length Management Organisations
CPI	Consumer Price Index
CPN	Community Psychiatric Nurse
DHP	Discretionary Housing Payment
FY	Financial year
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GFC	Global Financial Crisis
H-CLIC	Case level statutory homelessness data collection tool
HA	Housing Association
HAC	Housing Advice Centre
HB	Housing Benefit
HL1	Scottish Government statistical return on homelessness
HMA	Housing Market Area
HMO	House of Multiple Occupation
HRA	Homelessness Reduction Act
I-SPHERE	Institute of Social Policy, Housing and Equalities Research
KI	Key Informant
LA	Local Authority
LGiU	Local Government Information Unit
LHA	Local Housing Allowance
MDT	Multidisciplinary Team
MHCLG	Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local government
NCC	Newcastle City Council
NDTMS	National Drug Treatment Monitoring System
NFA	No Fixed Abode
NWA	Not willing to accommodate
OASys	Offender Assessment System
P1E	Government statistical return on homelessness
PIP	Personal Independence Payments
PRS	Private rented sector
SMD	Severe and Multiple Disadvantage
SP	Supporting People
SRA	Social Research Association
TA	Temporary Accommodation
TMJ	The Municipal Journal
UC	Universal Credit
YHN	Your Homes Newcastle

Executive Summary

This report examines how Newcastle's 'local state' (the city council and relevant partners) are preventing homelessness in the context of local government funding cuts and welfare reforms, and how these approaches might be improved. The mixed methods study has quantitatively compared Newcastle with other core cities using key administrative and survey-based data sources, and employed qualitative interviews and focus groups with expert local stakeholders, frontline workers, and residents with experience of homelessness or homelessness risk.

Key findings

- Newcastle has experienced a triple burden since 2010, facing amongst the most severe cuts in local authority budgets, among the worst impacted by welfare cuts, and one of the first areas to experience Universal Credit and its attended implementation and design challenges.

- In common with other core cities, Newcastle faces a more challenging context than the rest of England in relation to levels of poverty, destitution, and severe and multiple disadvantage. Low pay and working hours seem to be a serious and perhaps worsening problem in Newcastle.

- Newcastle's approach to homelessness prevention has four core characteristics: it is weighted towards *early prevention* and the mitigation of early signs of homelessness risk– before the government's 56 day target; it is *partnership-driven* reflecting the view that homelessness prevention is – and in a context of austerity must be – 'everyone's business'; it is *proactive* at the policy and practice level; and it is *data and evidence-informed*, with a strong focus on continuous learning and service improvement.

- Newcastle has low levels of homelessness compared to other core cities, and its surrounding Housing Market Area, on almost all measures. In particular, the city records very low levels of homelessness acceptances, households in temporary accommodation, and levels of street homelessness, and no use of unsuitable temporary accommodation like Bed and Breakfast accommodation for homeless households.

- The most likely combined explanations for these low levels of homelessness are Newcastle's housing market context – a relatively large stock of council housing more conducive to homelessness prevention, higher social lettings rates and lower private rent levels – and the city's very strong emphasis on and network of services for homelessness prevention.

- Arrears forbearance and support to council tenants; benefit advice, income maximisation and budgeting support; Discretionary Housing Payments; Alternative Payment Arrangements; facilitating access to the internet for people on Universal Credit; and the city's Homelessness Prevention Trailblazer were identified as particularly crucial to effective prevention. What is striking about this list is the domination of interventions seeking to mitigate the negative impacts of Central Government policies.

- There is scope to improve preventative interventions targeting single people, young people, those with complex needs, some groups of migrants and private tenants. Particular opportunities for improvement were identified in relation to mental health support, the scope and depth of current partnership arrangements between relevant agencies, employment support, access to social housing, and the quality of and access to homelessness services, particular for those with complex needs.

- Strengthening homelessness prevention in Newcastle in these ways requires a combination of action from national and local actors, including Central Government and relevant departments, Newcastle City Council and voluntary sector organisations.

Context

The current context in which Newcastle is seeking to prevent homelessness is extremely challenging. The city has been subject to among the very highest cuts to local government funding among the core cities, second only to Manchester and London, and reflecting a general pattern of the most deprived areas facing the greatest cuts to their budgets. In managing these cuts, spending on homelessness has been maintained, partly by attracting short term Government funding, which has contributed to a small increase since 2010. Supporting People budgets have been cut substantially in Newcastle, though notably less than in a number of the other cities, and similarly, mental health services have been somewhat protected relative to other 'high cuts' core cities. Cuts in Newcastle have overwhelmingly been concentrated in the 'other services' grouping, with the biggest component here being cuts to 'central services'. Cuts to library budgets are also part of this reduction in 'other services' spending, something seen to be relevant to homelessness prevention by stakeholders given the digitisation associated with Universal Credit.

Newcastle has also been among the worst impacted by cuts to household incomes linked to welfare cuts and reforms, which amount to over £2,000 per household since 2010. Specific reforms highlighted by local stakeholders as having a deleterious impact on households' income and thus increasing their risk of homelessness included the bedroom tax, the benefit cap, and the freeze on working age benefits including Local Housing Allowance. Benefit deductions addressing priority or public sector debts (including to cover previous tax credit overpayments, advance loans, court fines, or debts to 'third parties') were highlighted as an additional factor precipitating crisis. An acute locus of concern regarding welfare reforms in Newcastle was the introduction and roll out of Universal Credit, something navigated in Newcastle ahead of the timetable in most other areas.

In common with other core cities, Newcastle has high levels of destitution, and severe and multiple disadvantage. It is unusual in having adjacent areas which are as deprived, or worse, than the core city itself, something which may lead to higher levels of inward movement into Newcastle than in cities with better off peripheries, as households seek to make use of the opportunities (for services, employment etc.) perceived to be or in fact offered by the urban area. Low earnings at the bottom of the labour market are a more serious – and perhaps worsening problem – in Newcastle compared to other core cities. Newcastle's housing market context is more conducive to homelessness prevention, characterised by amongst the lowest private rents of the core cities and social lettings rates double those seen in most of the northern core cities and around three times the English average.

Newcastle's approach to homelessness prevention

Newcastle City Council have had a strong focus on homelessness prevention since the early 2000s catalysed by Central Government agendas in that decade, but extending through the 2010s despite the Government's 'light touch' approach for most of this latter period. During this time, a spectrum of approaches to homelessness prevention have been developed which extend far beyond the city's statutory duties under both pre- and post- Homelessness Reduction Act law. The city's approach to homelessness prevention has four core characteristics. First, it is weighted towards early or 'upstream' prevention seeking to identify early signs of homelessness risk and secure Newcastle residents the makings of a stable life – somewhere to live, an income, financial inclusion and employment opportunities – and thus reducing the likelihood of homelessness. Second, it is partnership-driven reflecting the view that homelessness prevention is – and in a context of long-term and deep austerity must be – 'everyone's business'. Third, it is proactive. At the policy level the

approach is proactive in seeking to maximise opportunities for contact with at-risk homeless households by engaging all relevant partners, and equipping those partners to provide substantive prevention interventions where possible, and effectively refer on to appropriate services. At the practice level it is proactive in being creative in how to identify, contact, engage, and maintain relationships with households at risk. Fourth, the approach to homelessness prevention is data and evidence informed, with a strong focus on collecting, reporting, sharing, and continuous learning from relevant statistics and information relevant to policy and practice.

Newcastle has taken advantage of various Central Government funding opportunities, including crucially, the through the Homelessness Prevention Trailblazer programme and developed a wide range of governance structures, partnerships, referral routes and interventions locally, in spite of the challenges of cuts to local government funding. Examples include the Active Inclusion Newcastle Unit and wider approach; the maintenance of a large welfare rights services within the city council and arms-length management organisation Your Homes Newcastle; protocols related to eviction from the social rented sector and seeking to prevent homelessness among those leaving institutions; and most recently the Street Zero partnership which aims to end street homelessness in the city by 2022.

Homelessness in Newcastle: scale, trends and profile
The scale of homelessness is susceptible to analysis via a range of data sources, and across almost all of these measures, Newcastle has low levels of homelessness. The city records very low absolute levels and rates of statutory homeless acceptances and households in temporary accommodation, low levels of street homelessness, and has made no use at all of unsuitable temporary accommodation like Bed and Breakfasts for homeless households since 2006. Using methods more heavily reliant on household surveys to estimate overall 'core homelessness' and thus escaping some of the limitations of administrative data sources, Newcastle also appears to have very low levels of homelessness compared to elsewhere – the lowest of all the core cities in 2017.

Despite having a very low rate of acceptances under homelessness legislation, Newcastle has statutory homeless application and decision levels in the middle/top of the core cities pack. This appears to be because a higher proportion of households applying as homelessness are found to be 'not homeless' or not in 'priority need', a pattern that likely reflects that the city's ambitious prevention services bring more households into the ambit of the statutory system than elsewhere, but also perhaps variations in the interpretation of the priority need test in different areas. It must be borne in mind that those not owed the full statutory duty in Newcastle benefit from a wide array of non-statutory services and now enjoy greater statutory entitlements (to prevention and relief) under the Homelessness Reduction Act. According to household survey data, and in common with other core cities, a significant number of households in Newcastle appear to experience hidden forms of homelessness like sofa surfing and staying with friends/family.

Trends in both statutory homelessness and rough sleeping in Newcastle are broadly stable, in stark contrast to those seen in London and the South of England. This reflects a broader regional story linked primarily to housing market context, but aided by Newcastle's preventative focus. It is too early to decipher clear trends in homelessness subsequent to the Homelessness Reduction Act coming into force in April 2018. Data from Newcastle from the last year prior to the Homelessness Reduction Act shows an uptick in homeless acceptances, in stark contrast to other core cities who have seen a decline. Though caution should be taken in interpreting a one-year change, this wider decline has been linked to local authorities 'gearing up' for the Homelessness Reduction Act, and it

may be that there was less scope to make short term gains in this manner in Newcastle given the pre-existing heavy emphasis on prevention.

In common with the rest of the country, the key triggers of statutory homelessness in Newcastle are the ending of private tenancies, along with violent relationship breakdown and family exclusions. The balance of triggers affecting the wider groups owed prevention and relief duties under the Homelessness Reduction Act are slightly different, with non-violent relationship breakdown and eviction from supported housing seemingly more important, alongside the ending of private tenancies and family exclusions. There are early indications that leaving student accommodation and returning from abroad are driving some homelessness. More households applying to the council as homeless have been staying with friends and family than come from the private or social rented sector, underlining the importance of finding modes of intervention targeting these more hidden groups.

Data on the profile of those experiencing homelessness and homelessness risk in Newcastle show that as in the rest of the country, Black and Minority Ethnic households are over-represented among those accepted as statutorily homeless, albeit that the absolute numbers are low. This likely reflects more general drivers of homelessness (i.e. poverty) disproportionately impacting this group, and combining with the challenges of recent migration for some households, as well as the fact that Newcastle is a main Home Office dispersal area. There are a subgroup of homeless individuals in the city who appear to be 'stuck in the system', experiencing various forms of core homelessness over a long-time period and cycling between rough sleeping and supported accommodation. Though small in terms of absolute numbers, this group is the most visible of the homeless population and associated with highest costs to the public pursue, in addition to the human impacts of this form of severe and enduring disadvantage.

Work to forecast levels of homelessness across England in the future as highlighted the fundamental role of poverty reduction in preventing homelessness, as well as making links between homelessness risk and unemployment, crime rates, and institutional discharge. Some of these 'levers' are subject to local manipulation and indeed, are being directly targeted to seek to prevent homelessness early and proactively in Newcastle. Many of the primary influences on these levers lie with Central Government, however, who has for the last decade or so taken a 'light touch' approach to steering local authority efforts on homelessness, combined with reforms to the welfare system and local government finance that are widely acknowledged to be pushing homelessness risk in the wrong direction.

Evaluating homelessness in Newcastle: service user perspectives
Interviews with 18 residents with experience of homelessness or homelessness risk in Newcastle highlighted a range of considerations relevant to prevention work in the city. Participants' housing and financial circumstances underline in sometimes shocking personal detail the very low income people are surviving on and the impact of this on their quality of life and security. Experiences of destitution – going without food and heating, in particular – were common, as was going without basic furniture, struggling to pay for travel around the city, and generally having to subsist on an extraordinarily low residual income, especially once deductions from benefits were taken into account. These circumstances were often what brought individuals into contact with services, but in many cases persisted after supportive interventions had been made, albeit that these had ameliorated some aspects of the situation. This demonstrates the limits – linked to a nationally driven

programme of welfare cuts – of the tools currently available at the local level to more adequately address the needs of some households.

Accessing social – and in particular council – housing and temporary/supported accommodation were a protective factor for households residing in these types of accommodation in various ways. Social housing gave people a sense of security even if they were still in financial difficulty, and a place to call and make home. Temporary and supported accommodation provided people with a safe place to stay while securing or working towards a longer-term housing solution, although it was clear that households often felt 'in limbo' in such accommodation and concerned about whether their longer-term housing outcome would suit them, both financially and in terms of its location near friends and family. For the young people in supported accommodation we spoke to, some clearly found this environment valuable, while others felt hindered from moving on with their lives by conditions of 'tenancy readiness'. Some of the people we spoke to had histories of rough sleeping and staying in the city's hostels. This crisis accommodation seemed to form part of this chaotic period of their lives rather than a clear route out of it, with normal housing offering better prospects, but the need for ongoing support incredibly important for those with vulnerabilities and support needs.

The experiences of those we spoke to point to some areas where local responses could be improved. Some had reached crisis point (e.g. the threat of eviction from social housing) apparently without a supportive intervention having been put in place. Others had not been effectively supported or referred to appropriate services when they initially sought help. Still others found particular services bureaucratic and not tailored to their needs, with employment support and expectations around work search highlighted here as problematic, and made harder in the context of people managing in situations of severe poverty. Struggles accessing and problems within the city's hostel system were also highlighted by several participants, so too the vital importance of in-tenancy support for vulnerable households when in settled housing. Examples of failures in joint working, for instance between domestic abuse services and social landlord teams, were also present, as were instances of poor advice and missed opportunities for early intervention.

Prevention services in the city had made a significant difference to many of those we spoke to. The biggest differences to participants' objective circumstances were seen when tangible financial help and advice was available to help resolve existing issues and make someone's financial circumstances more sustainable going forward. Discretionary Housing Payments and advice on/help applying for appropriate benefits had made very substantial differences to the circumstances of some of those we spoke to. Receiving holistic and personalised support and clearly communicated advice from named, friendly and approachable individuals had a significant and positive impact on the subjective wellbeing of those we spoke to, as well as positive practical impacts. Good relationships with particular staff underpinned the most positive comments we heard. In several cases, positive impacts were achieved following contact made with households by services, rather than the other way around, suggesting that the proactive early intervention approach pursued in the city is paying dividends in terms of accessing some households at risk before crisis, or before they have realised they are in crisis. In the context of the often severe poverty facing households we spoke to, practical subsistence help accessing food or paying for heating had helped many, as had other forms of support helping them access basic furniture. This underlines the value of the Crisis Support and Supporting Independence Schemes.

Evaluating homelessness prevention in Newcastle: key informant and frontline worker perspectives

There is a cross-sector consensus that Newcastle is a high performing authority in relation to homelessness prevention, something supported by our quantitative analysis of the scale of and trends in homelessness. Leadership was identified as the primary enabler of this approach. While national leadership in the early 2000s was recognised as an antecedent of current practice, in the past decade local leadership in managing the challenges associated with national government policies was highlighted as the key driver. Consistent political leadership from elected members was seen as essential in ensuring that homelessness and related budgets could in some cases be protected, relatively speaking, in the face of large-scale funding cuts. Administrative leadership from an ambitious, experienced and knowledgeable team of officers was identified as enabling an innovative and problem-solving approach. Other enablers of the current approach include the historic presence of strong third sector organisations in the city, a partnership-driven approach, and the internal structure of the local authority, which sees welfare rights and homelessness/housing teams working to the same corporate objectives.

A number of specific services and interventions were seen to be particularly important and effective in preventing homelessness, including forbearance and support from Your Homes Newcastle (who manages Newcastle's council housing stock) in relation to rent arrears; advice on benefit entitlements and income maximisation, especially unpicking errors in relation to Universal Credit claims; budgeting support; Discretionary Housing Payments; and Alternative Payment Arrangements; 'easements' to Universal Credit/Jobseekers' Allowance-related work search requirements for those experiencing a domestic emergency; and facilitating access to IT equipment and the internet for people to manage their Universal Credit claim effectively online. What is striking about this list is the domination of interventions seeking to mitigate the negative impacts on poverty and homelessness of Central Government policies. Newcastle's work as a Homelessness Prevention Trailblazer authority is perceived to have been extremely positive. The multidisciplinary team has modelled new ways of working proactively and intensively with at-risk households and the partnership between the Jobcentre, local authority, Your Homes Newcastle and Crisis is widely seen to have radically increased opportunities for supportive interventions to target homelessness risk upstream and pre-crisis.

Room for improvement in the responses to some specific sub-groups of the homeless population were identified. Particular concern was voiced about single people and single men, reflecting that they face access to lower levels of benefit entitlements, fewer kinds of support services than are available to families, and often also lack informal support networks. Young people were also a locus of concern given their even lower entitlements to welfare support at a time when they are navigating the transition to adulthood. Some of Newcastle's supported accommodation provision for young people was seen to be too large scale and crisis-oriented and thus falling short of enabling young people to move on into mainstream housing and to address their wider needs. A number of specific migrant groups were also highlighted as facing a series of barriers to effective homelessness prevention, in particular those transitioning from asylum seeker services, European migrants seeking to claim Universal Credit, and those without recourse to public funds. Challenges were also highlighted identifying private tenants at risk of homelessness before crisis point. The group of most concern, however, were those with complex needs. The city's supported and hostel accommodation was not seen to meet the needs of this group (and indeed to sometimes exacerbate them), with calls made for better access to mainstream housing, the protection of housing support budgets, and the scaling up and improvement of Housing First provision.

Efforts to develop homelessness prevention in Newcastle are impacted by a series of challenges, limitations and barriers. Welfare reforms combined with cuts to local government budgets have created an environment in which often the best local responses can possibly achieve for households is to 'keep the wolf from the door' and meet basic subsistence needs, with a life free from financial hardship simply out of reach for some households. Where resources from Central Government were available to enable responses to homelessness, the structure of these was often far from ideal, with funding pots being cash- and time-limited, subject to fixed cohort restrictions, and focused on crisis responses rather than prevention. Even the Homelessness Reduction Act, the preventative 'spirit' of which was welcomed, was seen to not go far enough in facilitating upstream and cross-sector, cross-departmental prevention. Concerns around data protection and information sharing were also highlighted as a barrier to maximising opportunities for effective prevention.

A number of opportunities for improvements in Newcastle's homelessness prevention landscape were identified by those working in the sector. The availability of and access to mental health support was identified as a major issue interacting with homelessness risk in the city, with a particular focus on the need to improve support available to those with mental health problems that do not meet clinical thresholds. Despite the city's strong focus on homelessness prevention being 'everyone's business', considerable scope was identified for improving partnership working and structures, particularly involving health services, but also addiction, probation and offender management, education, and children's and social services, and local businesses. Protocols for leaving some institutions (asylum seeker accommodation and prisons) are not seen by local stakeholders to be working as effectively as they could due to issues on the originating institution side. Buy-in from the voluntary and community sector appears to be uneven, with some tension evident around the role local actors felt the local authority should play in driving partnership approaches. While those within the local authority see a clear moral case – and electoral mandate – for strong leadership, some voluntary sector colleagues call for an 'enabling approach' that sees third sector organisations as more equal partners.

Gaps were also identified in the employment support arena in light of the ever more essential role of employment as a possible route out of poverty given the retracting welfare safety-net. In addition, a series of weaknesses were highlighted in relation to exclusions from housing and homelessness services. The role of affordability and other background checks in excluding vulnerable and low income households from social housing was seen to be particularly unhelpful from a homelessness prevention perspective. Help to those sleeping rough was also seen to be weakened by the deployment of various exclusionary practices including sometimes rigorous use of local connection rules and reconnection offers, restrictions on the support available to those with a history of violence in supported accommodation, and to those sleeping rough with a dog. Eviction from and abandonment of supported and crisis accommodation was identified as another important exclusionary mechanism undermining homelessness prevention efforts in Newcastle.

Conclusions and recommendations

A series of recommendations arise from our analysis, and these target a combination of local and national actors, including Newcastle City Council itself, Central Government departments, but also other local actors across the voluntary sector and public sector. This spread of recommendations acknowledges the wide variety of organisations with a role to play in identifying homelessness risk early and mitigating it. In particular, they reflect the foundational role of Central Government in

setting the national policy and funding framework in which population level risk of homelessness and local government's capacity to respond to it is shaped.

The current context is particularly pernicious in his regard, with local authority efforts to prevent homelessness directly limited by national policies that increase homelessness risk and restrict local authorities' capacity to respond effectively to it. Welfare reform measures that have made households poorer, and local government budget cuts that have made councils poorer are the key culprits here, but numerous other, smaller and more specific examples of government policy inhibiting more effective homelessness prevention have been given throughout this report.

Newcastle City Council, like other local authorities, is fighting homelessness with one hand tied behind its back, making the positive story about trends in and levels of homelessness in the city particularly impressive, and emphasising that even in this extremely challenging context a significant and sustained difference can be made by locally-driven approaches, especially within a more enabling housing market context. Nevertheless, while Newcastle has demonstrated impressive capacity to protect residents from homelessness, in many cases local services are unable to provide residents with the foundations of a stable life in the way the city council wishes to. While there is then scope for locally driven improvements to homelessness prevention work in Newcastle, the 'local state' will continue to be constrained to a substantial degree until these national-level barriers are removed.

Recommendations for national actors
1. Central Government should review the scale, distribution, and impacts of local authority budget cuts, including on homelessness, homelessness prevention, and housing support services, and recognise the challenges associated with multiple short-term, rigidly structured, and narrowly focused funding pots in compensating for this. Central Government should ensure that local authorities have sufficient and sustainable funds to prevent and alleviate homelessness effectively;

2. Central Government should urgently review the impact of post-2010 welfare reforms on homelessness and homelessness risk, including the benefit cap, bedroom tax, freeze to working age benefits, Local Housing Allowance caps, and Universal Credit, and improve primary prevention measures at the national level by ensuring that social security entitlements cover households' realistic housing costs and enable them to escape poverty and destitution;

3. The Home Office should work with Asylum Accommodation and Support Service providers and the Ministry of Justice with Community Rehabilitation Companies to address barriers inhibiting Newcastle City Council's capacity to prevent homelessness among those leaving asylum accommodation and prison, ensuring that notice of discharge from such institutions is given at least 56 days in advance and that sufficient information is provided to enable an effective response;

4. The Department of Health should work with local health professionals to ensure they play a greater role in homelessness prevention, including enabling General Practitioners and other relevant health professionals to identify early signs of homelessness risk among patients and give timely and affordable support to households applying for benefits on the basis of health needs. The Department of Health should also recognise the potential role of mental health problems in increasing homelessness risk, and support the provision of services working with people with

mental health problems (including those falling below clinical intervention thresholds) to reduce homelessness risk;

5. The Department of Education should consider its role in helping to minimise homelessness risk among those leaving education institution;

6. The Department for Work and Pensions should strengthen the employment support offer to improve access to paid work, increase the income those entering work at the bottom end of labour market receive, and help to ensure the sustainability of work. This could involve interventions seeking to increase the demand for paid work opportunities (via childcare provision and other support to un/under-employed households) and the supply of employment opportunities (via work with employers);

7. The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government should review the effectiveness of the Duty to Refer and consider strengthening the scope and nature of obligations on other public agencies to play a role in the early identification of homelessness risk, and the resolution of homelessness. A wider range of relevant health professionals should be included in the Duty to Refer, including General Practitioners;

8. The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government should consider how to support and encourage local authorities in providing early interventions that seek to prevent homelessness prior to households being at risk within 56 days, alongside their duties under the Homelessness Reduction Act;

9. Central Government and the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government should recognise the valuable potential protective role of social – and specifically council – housing in preventing homelessness and providing households with a secure and affordable home. The supply and management of social housing should be supported accordingly;

10. The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government should conduct a review of social housing allocations, with a focus on access to housing for low income households and those at risk or with previous experience of homelessness;

11. The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government should review the role of the ending of private rented tenancies in precipitating homelessness and seek to strengthen tenant rights to minimise homelessness risk for those residing in private rented accommodation;

12. Central Government should ensure that local authorities have the guidance and expertise they need to share information between and within all relevant public and voluntary sector organisations to facilitate the identification of early signs of homelessness risk, and maximise effective homelessness prevention, in line with the requirements of data protection regulations.

Recommendations for local actors
1. Newcastle City Council should maintain its strong emphasis on early homelessness prevention. Support available to those at more immediate risk and already experiencing homelessness – including episodically and chronically homeless individuals with complex needs – should be strengthened and improved, including via routes identified in the recommendations below;

2. Voluntary sector partners and accommodation providers and Newcastle City Council should improve the quality of congregate crisis and supported accommodation provision to minimise issues of abandonment, eviction and exclusion from these services and maximise positive move-on, with a particular focus on episodically and chronically homeless individuals with complex needs, and including young people's supported accommodation.

3. Newcastle City Council and voluntary sector partners and accommodation providers should review formal and informal criteria influencing access to support and accommodation, including via the city's street outreach team, in particular those relating to local connection rules and reconnection offers, histories of violence in crisis/supported accommodation, and dog ownership, and consider how these practices interact with local efforts to ensure the sustainable prevention and relief of homelessness, and in particular the aim of ending rough sleeping in Newcastle by 2022;

4. Newcastle City Council and voluntary sector crisis and supported accommodation providers should move towards a rapid rehousing approach for single homeless households, including via the expansion of and improvements to the fidelity of Housing First provision in the city for those with complex needs, and more generally by ensuring access to mainstream accommodation with adequate floating support for those residing in temporary, supported or crisis accommodation;

5. Local health professionals (see below), probation/offender management partners, social housing anti-social behaviour teams (in particular relation to joined up working in response to domestic violence and abuse), addiction services, voluntary sector welfare rights and homelessness organisations, and other local partners working with residents at potential risk of homelessness should participate actively in the partnership approach to homelessness prevention currently pursued in Newcastle. Newcastle City Council should (continue to) facilitate and encourage the involvement of these partners;

6. Local health partners should play a greater role in homelessness prevention, with a particular focus on the role of General Practitioners and other relevant health professionals identifying early signs of homelessness risk among patients and giving timely and affordable support to households applying for benefits on the basis of health needs. Local health partners should also recognise the potential role of mental health problems in increasing homelessness risk, and the value of supporting households with mental health problems (including those falling below clinical intervention thresholds) in reducing homelessness risk. Local health partners should provide expertise/advice to non-health services (including social landlords and housing/welfare advice services) where household's health and mental health problems are contributing to homelessness risk;

7. Newcastle City Council should strengthen information sharing and joint working between local authority departments. This study would indicate a particular focus on Children's Services and Council Tax support;

8. Newcastle City Council should consider – based on emerging evidence from H-CLIC statistics – developing new relationships and protocols with higher education institutions to improve the prospects of students leaving such accommodation with nowhere safe to live;

9. Newcastle City Council explore whether it can strengthen the employment support offer to improve residents' access to paid work, increase the income those entering work at the bottom end of labour market receive, and help to ensure the sustainability of that work. This could involve interventions seeking to increase the demand for paid work opportunities (via childcare provision and other support to un/under-employed residents) and the supply of employment opportunities (via work with employers);

10. Newcastle City Council should review social housing allocation practices across the city's providers (Your Homes Newcastle and housing associations), with a view to ensuring the city's high social lettings rates are being leveraged to achieve positive outcomes for those experiencing or at risk of homelessness, with particular attention to social landlord practices excluding households due to affordability concerns, previous rent arrears, offending histories, or for other reasons;

11. Newcastle City Council should protect the provision of face-to-face support for vulnerable residents who struggle to use online or phone-based provision and facilitate positive relationships between households at risk of homelessness and named, approachable frontline workers. Newcastle City Council should also seek to safeguard and strengthen access to IT facilities for those without such access, and support those without the relevant skills to use it;

12. Newcastle City Council should develop mechanisms and protocols to enhance the prevention of homelessness caused by the ending of private rented tenancies, including by building relationships with private landlords, and consider the role of incentives-based approaches to encouraging landlords to help support services identify tenants at risk of homelessness;

13. Newcastle City Council should explore ways to better identify households at risk of homelessness in more 'hidden' situations, including among those living in private tenancies, sofa surfing/staying with friends and family, and or living with a partner but at risk of homelessness linked to violent or non-violent relationship breakdown.

1. Introduction

Background

Since 2013, Newcastle City Council (NCC) has sought to make the prevention of homelessness, poverty and destitution 'everyone's business' through its Active Inclusion Newcastle (AIN) partnership which supports residents to have access to the foundations of a stable life: somewhere to live, an income, financial inclusion and employment opportunities. This approach builds on a longer history of Newcastle seeking to lead the field in the early prevention of homelessness which can be traced back to the early 2000s (Fitzpatrick et al, 2011). More recently, funding awarded by Central Government made Newcastle one of three early adopter Homelessness Prevention Trailblazers and enabled the Council to take this early prevention agenda further. This long-term and still evolving focus on the early prevention of homelessness in Newcastle has gone alongside substantial wider national policy and funding changes since 2010.

First, Central Government cuts to local authority budgets have substantially reduced the funding available to provide services (Smith et al, 2016). Newcastle has been subject to more severe budget cuts than other local authority areas, facing an overall cut of 32% between 2010/11 and 2018/19[1] (see also Hastings et al, 2015). According to Newcastle City Council, they will have lost a total of £327 million from local authority budgets by 2022 (2018i). This has put particular pressure on non-statutory services, which local authorities have more latitude to cut than statutory services (National Audit Office [NAO], 2018). Until April 2018, all homelessness prevention activity was non-statutory provision (see below).

Second, post-2010 welfare reforms have reduced the income of already low income households living in Newcastle. In 2016, Beatty and Forthergill (2016) estimated that Newcastle was in the top 20 worst effected local authorities in Great Britain. Using a methodology similar to that of Beatty and Fothergill, Newcastle City Council have estimated that these reforms will together result in an annual cut to income from working age benefits of £122 million by 2023/24 in the city (2019c). Other things being equal, these pressures on the income of already poorer households can be expected to increase the risks of Newcastle residents experiencing homelessness, given the causal link between poverty and homelessness (Bramley and Fitzpatrick, 2018).

Third, there have been significant recent changes to homelessness legislation in England, which expand the legal duties local authorities owe to households at risk of or experiencing homelessness. Before April 2018, local authorities had long-standing duties to rehouse households in 'priority need' (mainly families with children), with non-priority households (most single people) owed only advice and assistance. From the early 2000s, however, local authorities have been encouraged to actively prevent homelessness through the provision of non-statutory Housing Options advice and assistance (Fitzpatrick et al, 2017). Following the recommendations of an independent panel of experts convened to assess the strengths and weaknesses of the existing statutory framework (Crisis, 2015), in April 2018, the Homelessness Reduction Act came into force. The Act's central provisions introduce a homelessness 'prevention duty' for all eligible households threatened with homelessness, alongside a 'relief duty' to take 'reasonable steps' to help secure accommodation for eligible homeless applicants. These prevention and relief duties apply regardless of priority need or intentionality status. The new legislation also extends the definition of those 'threatened' with

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[1] Authors' own analysis.

homelessness (and owed the new prevention duty) to those likely to lose their home within 56 days, rather than the previous 28 (see Fitzpatrick et al, 2018b). Prevention activities prior to the 56 days may continue to be provided by local authorities on a discretionary basis, but such activity is no longer monitored by Central Government after the replacement of previous P1E returns with the new Homelessness Reduction Act's statistical returns package (H-CLIC).

These combined changes create challenges and opportunities for Newcastle City Council's focus on early prevention. The cumulative impact of welfare reforms clearly reduce the resources available to residents to sustain their own housing. Local authority budget cuts reduce the resources available to fund services, both statutory and non-statutory, and those specifically focused on homelessness, as well as other services which may safeguard households from homelessness in less direct ways. The localisation of various forms of welfare support also reduce the national safety-net available to households, putting it under threat at the local level for financial and/or political reasons. It could perhaps also be argued that the localisation of aspects of welfare support increases the 'touch points' and flexibility local authorities have to respond to homelessness. These pressures may also be argued to create pressure for innovation and partnership working to improve traditional and 'siloed' responses to social issues. The Homelessness Reduction Act expands local authority obligations to assist those facing homelessness, and the 'priority blind' nature of the provisions means that higher numbers and a broader range of household types are approaching local authorities for assistance when experiencing housing difficulties. The Act also legally enshrines a focus on prevention in the two months preceding likely homelessness, both enforcing preventative activity on local authorities 'lagging behind' in homelessness prevention (Dobie et al, 2014), but also arguably risk undermining the efforts of authorities already focused on targeting even earlier preventative interventions at at-risk households (NCC, 2018j).

It is in this context that in late 2018 Newcastle City Council commissioned the Institute for Social Policy, Housing and Equalities Research (I-SPHERE) to undertake a study to explore and assess its approach to homelessness prevention.

Understanding homelessness prevention
Homelessness prevention is generally understood in the academic literature in relation to a three way typology that distinguishes between: *primary prevention*, which seeks to prevent new individuals or households becoming homeless, often through, for example, poverty reduction or affordable housing provision; *secondary prevention*; which seek to identify and end an occurrence of homelessness as swiftly as possible through, for example, landlord mediation or help with rental payments; and t*ertiary prevention*, focused on addressing the needs of those already experiencing homelessness in a more enduring way and thus seeking to prevent longer term housing and homelessness issues (see Mackie, 2015). There have been other slightly differing conceptualisations of this three way typology, with some defining secondary prevention as targeting those at risk of homelessness for some reason rather than those already homeless and tertiary homelessness applying more generally to interventions targeting the 'already homeless', whether recently or longer-term (see Busch-Geertsema and Fitzpatrick, 2008; Jacobs, 2018).

It has also been suggested that primary prevention can be disaggregated into three categories: *universal* prevention interventions which span entire populations; *selected* interventions that target at risk *groups*, and *indicated* interventions which target people at risk based on some *individual* rather than group-level characteristic or set of characteristics (Shinn et al, 2001).

More recently, the Prevention Task and Finish Group in England (chaired by the Local Government Association and involving a range of third sector, local authority and central government representatives) proposed a five-way typology of homelessness prevention (Prevention Task and Finish Group, 2018). Their specific focus was on rough sleeping, but conceptually the typology is applicable to homelessness in general. They distinguish between: *universal* prevention which is population-wide and seeks to reduce overall levels of risk; *targeted* prevention, focusing on at risk groups and transition points (e.g. those leaving institutions); *crisis* prevention, which focuses on preventing homelessness when risk is imminent (defined as within 56 days in line with the Homelessness Reduction Act); *emergency* prevention, working with those at immediate risk of homelessness (i.e. that night or similar); and *recovery* prevention, focusing on minimising repeat homelessness among those experiencing/who have experienced it.

In Newcastle itself, a hybrid version of this primary/secondary/tertiary typology is used to categorise the spectrum of preventative interventions in place in the city that does not align exactly with either of the versions described above, and it is this local version that we use to describe preventative interventions in the city in chapter four. In their homelessness prevention briefings[2], *primary* prevention is described as targeting those seen to be at risk of homelessness but not imminently; *secondary* prevention, targeting those at more imminent risk of homelessness (within 56 days); and *crisis* interventions, for those who are 'literally' homeless, i.e. do not have any accommodation they can currently occupy. This particular version may reflect the levers in the hands of the local authority to influence homelessness, with many of the levers associated with 'classic' universal and population-wide primary prevention lying primarily at Westminster, rather than local authorities. These existing typologies are introduced as a means of framing this Newcastle-specific conversation and potentially as a way of illuminating gaps in current provision and areas for the future development of services.

Research objectives

This overarching objective of the current study is to illuminate and explore how Newcastle's 'local state' (Newcastle City Council and its partners) are responding to the challenges and opportunities outlined above and deploying available, but limited, resources to prevent homelessness. The following five research questions will guide the research:

1. How do current levels of, and recent trends in, homelessness and poverty/destitution in Newcastle compare to the national picture?
2. What have been the impacts of welfare reforms and local government funding cuts in Newcastle since 2010, and how does this compare with other areas in England?
3. How well have Newcastle City Council and its key partners responded to the challenges associated with welfare reforms and austerity, specifically with regard to the prevention of, and responses to, homelessness?
4. How can homelessness prevention in Newcastle be improved in the future? What are the barriers and enablers to doing better? How can local data be best harnessed to support these efforts, especially with regard to more upstream forms of prevention?
5. What does this Newcastle case study tell us about both the possibilities for, and limits of, the local state role when the UK central state radically reduces support for the most disadvantaged citizens?

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[2] See https://www.newcastle.gov.uk/services/housing/housing-advice-and-homelessness/information-professionals/newcastle-homelessness

Report structure

Having outlined the background to the study in this introductory chapter, chapter two provides an account of the research strategy and design deployed to answer these research questions and meet the overall research objective. Chapter three sets the context for homelessness prevention activity in Newcastle, exploring the nature, scale and impact of local authority budget cuts and welfare reforms in Newcastle as compared to other 'core cities', as well as providing an account of Newcastle's housing and labour market, and levels of poverty, destitution and severe and multiple disadvantage in the city. Chapter four provides an account of Newcastle's current approach to homelessness prevention, spanning primary, secondary and crisis interventions. Chapter five then maps and tracks levels of and trends in homelessness in Newcastle compared to other core cities, to begin to assess the effectiveness and limits of current homelessness prevention efforts. Chapter six focuses on the experiences of a sample of people with experience of homelessness or being at risk of homelessness in Newcastle to explore their experiences and assessment of the services they accessed and support they received. Chapter seven builds on this analysis deploying qualitative data from key informants and frontline workers in Newcastle to evaluate the city's approach to homelessness prevention and identify the potential and limits of developing and enhancing prevention work further. Chapter eight provides and account of the study's conclusions and makes a series of recommendations for the future development of preventative approaches in the city.

2. Research strategy and design

To meet the overarching study objective and answer the research questions outlined in chapter one, the research team deployed a five-stage research strategy. All elements of the research were conducted in line with the Social Research Association's Ethical Guidelines (SRA, 2003) with a particular focus on the research team's obligation to protect those involved in the research from harm, and ensure that their participation is entirely voluntary and based on informed consent[3].

1. Documentary analysis

The research team undertook a rapid review of key literature relevant to Newcastle City Council and partners' strategic and policy approach to homelessness prevention, spanning documents relating to strategy, service planning and design, and data collection, monitoring and evaluation. The review also covered key academic and grey literature relevant to the research questions. The primary focus was on literature produced since 2010, with priority accorded to more recent available documents, and those most relevant to the research questions. This aspect of the research design provided a context and foundation for the remaining research, and in particular provided documentary evidence pertaining to research questions 2 and 3 concerning the impacts of local government funding cuts and welfare reforms in Newcastle (RQ2) and Newcastle City Council and partner's responses to these challenges in specific relation to homelessness prevention (RQ3).

2. Quantitative data analysis

The research team also undertook analysis of a range of relevant large-scale datasets and ongoing work modelling future trends in homelessness to place Newcastle in the broader national context with respect to levels of and trends in both homelessness, and relatedly, complex needs, poverty/severe poverty, destitution, welfare benefit reductions and local government funding cuts (RQ1 and 2).

Our quantitative analysis of homelessness goes beyond the conventional reporting of statutory homeless numbers to include different ways of framing and estimating 'core' homelessness numbers, and reviews findings from recent modelling and forecasting of these numbers. In particular we draw on the study of *Homelessness Projections* undertaken for Crisis (Bramley, 2017 and forthcoming) and the further study of *Housing Requirements for Lower Income Households and Homeless People* undertaken for Crisis and the National Housing Federation (Bramley, 2018 and forthcoming). We also draw on estimates of destitution derived as part of major studies for the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (Fitzpatrick et al, 2018a, Bramley et al, 2018) and of 'severe and multiple disadvantage' (SMD) derived from the study *Hard Edges* for the Lankelly Chase Foundation (Bramley et al, 2015).

Quantitative analysis on trends in key potential drivers of homelessness and severe poverty was also reviewed, for example in terms of labour and housing market trends and key demographic factors (migration), as well as indicators of complex needs which are associated with homelessness for many people. We also quantify the effects of some key policies which have impacted on the populations of Newcastle and other cities, and constrained the ability of these authorities to respond to the problems faced, namely post-2010 welfare reforms and local authority budget cuts.

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[3] The research design was approved by the Heriot-Watt School of Energy, Geoscience, Infrastructure and Society Ethics Committee.

For the majority of data presented we set Newcastle within the context of the broad class of city local authorities to which it belongs, the so-called 'Core Cities', that is, the six central cities of former Metropolitan Counties, plus the three largest unitary city authorities in 'Non-Metropolitan' England, plus the central boroughs of London (which provide a benchmark as the 'epicentre' of homelessness in England). We also report some indicators for these core cities plus their immediate 'hinterlands', namely the group of local authorities which also fall within the same 'Housing Market Area' (HMA)[4]. For Newcastle this is represented by Gateshead, North and South Tyneside and County Durham[5]. Conventional 'Government Office Regions' are also used in some cases, along with breakdowns by level of deprivation and similar measures.

3. Key informant interviews

Key informant interviews with 16 expert stakeholders were undertaken in December 2018/January 2019. Participants were purposively selected to elicit a range of cross-sector perspectives on Newcastle City Council and partners' homelessness prevention activity. As such, key informants spanned the statutory (n=10), voluntary (n=3) and social housing sectors (n=3) and included local statutory sector staff and representatives working in relevant roles, Central Government department stakeholders, local social housing and homelessness providers, and wider local voluntary sector stakeholders. Most key informants (n=13) had a primarily Newcastle specific remit, albeit that those in this category were able to reflect on Newcastle's position relative to other cities and/or regions to some extent. A small number (n=3) had a wider regional (North East or Tyne) or national (England-wide) remit.

These interviews covered four main themes: the nature of homelessness in Newcastle; current approaches to homelessness prevention in the city and the strengths and weaknesses of these approaches; the impact of national policy change on homelessness and homelessness prevention in Newcastle; and directions for the development and improvement of homelessness prevention policy and practice in the future. This element of the research design thus offered insights relevant to the full suite of research questions, but in particular RQ3 and RQ4 concerning approaches to homelessness prevention, responding to the challenges of austerity and welfare reform, and improving prevention.

Interviews were undertaken either face-to-face or by phone, and recorded and transcribed verbatim to enable thematic coding and matrix analysis within the qualitative analysis software package NVivo. Informed consent was secured prior to recording and confirmed 'on the record'. Participation was entirely voluntary and on a confidential basis. Quotations used in the rest of this report are labeled using generic attributions to give the reader some sense of the key informant's perspective but also to maintain the anonymity of participants in the context of Newcastle's small policy and practice community.

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[4] The HMAs used here are those which provide the base for the Sub-Regional Housing Market Model, which is used for forecasting homelessness and other housing market outcomes in Bramley et al (2016a, 2016b) and Bramley (2017, 2018). They number 102 across England and derive from interim output from the study by Jones, Coombes and Wong (2011) for NHPA/DCLG. It should be noted that Leeds, a generously-bounded city, has no additional authorities in its HMA in this system.

[5] The HMAs were determined based on whole LA districts, but using pre-2009 boundaries. The creation of unitary authorities for Durham and Northumberland affects the Tyneside HMA significantly, so we can only approximate by including the whole of Co Durham but excluding the whole of Northumberland.

4. Frontline staff focus groups

Four focus groups were undertaken in December 2018/January 2019 to elicit the perspectives of frontline staff working in relevant roles across Newcastle City Council and partner agencies. In total, 29 individuals took part in these focus groups. Two of the focus groups involved staff working in homelessness prevention within the local authority (n=16), and included individuals working with households already homeless or at risk of homelessness within 56 days and thus meeting the council's duties under the Homelessness Reduction Act; money, welfare rights and debt advisors; and those working in wider 'active inclusion' services focused on various kinds of early ('pre-56 days') prevention activities (see chapter four for more details about the homelessness prevention services provided in Newcastle). The other two focus groups involved staff working in partner agencies in roles involving a homelessness prevention dimension (n=13), including those working in local social housing providers (including the council's arms length management organization Your Homes Newcastle) and voluntary sector welfare rights advice and homelessness organisations.

Focus groups covered themes similar to those explored with key informants, but with greater emphasis on the nature, changes in and challenges associated with frontline service provision in the homelessness prevention and related advice arena. As such, data from this element of the research has contributed to answering all the research questions, but made a core contribution to RQ3 and 4.

Participants were informed about the nature and purpose of the focus groups in advanced, with participation on a voluntary basis and informed consent secured prior to each focus group commencing. Each was recorded and transcribed verbatim to allow for thematic coding and matrix analysis in NVivo. Once again, to maintain anonymity quotations from focus groups are labeled using broad attributions relating to the nature of their role.

5. Interviews with those subject to homelessness prevention interventions

The final element of our research design involved interviews with 18 individuals with experience of homelessness prevention interventions in Newcastle. Participants were purposively selected to capture a range of household types/subgroups, and in particular to span those who have been subject to 'upstream' preventative interventions (at risk of homelessness but not within 56 days); interventions targeting those closer to homelessness (i.e. within 56 days and owed a duty under the Homelessness Reduction Act); and/or responsive crisis services. We also sought to sample a number of households who were currently homeless or had recently experienced homeless to explore missed opportunities for prevention.

Participants were accessed via staff in a range of services working with these groups, including the Housing Advice Centre, the Homelessness Prevention Trailblazer multidisciplinary team, Cherry Tree View temporary accommodation and outreach prevention service, the city's ALMO Your Homes Newcastle, and a supported accommodation project. Staff in relevant services made an initial approach to potential participants, explaining the nature and purpose of the research aided by a written information sheet provided by the research team, and securing prospective participants' consent to be approached. The research team then approached prospective participants either by phone, or in person at a service location, reiterating the nature and purpose of the research, and what participation would involve. It was emphasized that taking part was entirely voluntary, on an anonymous basis (i.e. no identifying characteristics would be reported in study outputs) and had no bearing on participants' access to services. Informed consent to participate on this basis, and for interviews to be recorded, was elicited aided by a consent form prior to interviews commencing and

confirmed on the recording. Each participant received a £20 high street voucher to thank them for their time.

The final sample of 18 individuals was made of nine single person households, seven lone parents/primary carers for dependent children, and one couple interviewed together at their own request. Of the individuals with primary caring responsibility for dependent children, the number of children in the household ranged from one to five. One participating family included two children with disabilities. Of the overall sample, eleven were women and seven men. Participants' age ranged from 18 to 53 with an average age of 36. We spoke to five young people aged under 25, three of whom were care experienced. Reflecting our sampling strategy, participants were in a range of housing circumstances at the time of interview (see chapter six for further discussion).

Interviews were guided by a topic guide covering the key lines of inquiry, these being: their current circumstances (in relation to housing, employment, income/expenditure, etc.); their use of support and advice services; and their views of how services could be improved. All interviews were recorded with the participants' consent and transcribed verbatim to allow for thematic coding and matrix analysis in NVivo. To maintain anonymity, quotations used in this report are labeled using attributions detailing only participants broad circumstances and characteristics relevant to interpreting the point in question (e.g. household type, age, housing situation).

Conclusion

This study therefore utilizes a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods to answer the five research questions driving the work. The next chapter seeks to set the context for homelessness prevention activity in Newcastle using a combination of quantitative analysis of large-scale data sets and qualitative data from key informant and frontline worker interviews and focus groups. The focus is on characterising Newcastle's housing and labour market; describing the impact of local government funding cuts and welfare reforms in the city; and exploring the incidence of poverty, destitution and severe and multiple disadvantage. The main comparators deployed are England's other 'core cities', with some comparisons also drawn between broader housing market areas extending beyond the cities in question, and the English regions.

3. Context

This chapter considers the context for homelessness prevention in Newcastle, comparing the city and wider Tyneside region to other core cities and English regions on a range of characteristics relevant to homelessness incidence and trends. The chapter draws primarily on the analysis of large-scale data sets outlined in chapter two, utilizing qualitative key informant interview and frontline staff focus group data to aid the interpretation of this quantitative data.

The first two sections consider the impacts of two major sets of national government policy changes, namely budget cuts to local government and the array of welfare reforms pursued by Conservative or Conservative-led Westminster governments since 2010. In the subsequent sections, we focus on how Newcastle's housing and labour markets compare to other core cities and the likely impacts of these contextual factors on homelessness. In the penultimate sections of the chapter we consider levels of poverty, severe poverty and destitution in Newcastle compared to elsewhere given poverty's status as a key driver of homelessness. Finally, we consider severe and multiple disadvantage in Newcastle, that is, the relative scale of 'complex needs' homelessness that co-occurs with offending and/or substance misuse compared to other areas.

Government spending cuts

The period since the 2010 Election can justly be labelled as one of 'austerity' and this approach to public spending bore particularly hard on local government budgets over this period. Only in the last year or so has there been any hint of relaxation, with some local authorities raising council tax levels to fund marginal increases in some budgets, particularly social care and children's services (Local Government Information Unit [LGiU]/The Municipal Journal [TMJ], 2019). In a 2019 survey of local authorities, housing and homelessness were flagged as a top financial pressure, tied with Adult Social Care as a second most urgent immediate pressure (23% saw it as such) and with Environment Waste as a second most urgent long-term pressure (for 17% of local authorities) (LGiU/TMJ, 2019).

The main analysis presented here builds on work undertaken in projects for the Joseph Rowntree Foundation leading up the report on *Counting the Cost of the Cuts* (Hastings et al 2015, 2017), but bringing the story up to date. Newcastle was in fact a case study in this research. Austerity cuts in local finance began in earnest with the Summer Budget of 2010, following the Election, so we measure change from the original financial settlement and budgets set for financial year (FY) 2010/11. Mainly we look at changes in spending in real terms (adjusting for general inflation) per capita between 2010 and 2018, using budgeted[6] spend as reported in the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy's *Financial and General Statistics*. However, we do also look at percentage changes and changes in the shorter recent period from 2016 to 2018. The main measures presented are for current expenditure on services, excluding school spending[7], and we highlight particular services of interest for this study: homelessness, 'Supporting People', other housing (including private sector regulation), mental health (local authority adult social care services for

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[6] Since British local government operates essentially under balanced budget rules, budgets bear a reasonably close relationship to actual spend.

[7] In England since the 2000s schools have had increasing financial autonomy from local authorities, with funding passed through directly as 'Direct Schools Grant', while increasing numbers of Schools have become 'Academies' or 'Free Schools' and thereby move out of local government sector spending. Because this process is uneven over time and space it is generally better to analyse local government spending excluding schools.

people with mental health problems), children's services and 'non-school' education[8], and all other non-education services (transport, other adult social care, environmental regulation, culture & recreation, planning, central services).

Figure 1 starts to build the picture by showing the cumulative magnitude of cuts over eight years, broken down by the above service groupings and by region. Service spending has been cut by £200 per head (circa £500 per household) on average in England overall, equivalent to a 13% cut[9]. However, there was considerable disparity between regions in the magnitude of cuts, ranging from £334 per head in London and £287 in the North to a mere £119 in the South East.

Figure 1: Real terms cuts in Local Government expenditure per capita by relevant service by region, 2010-18 (£ per head)
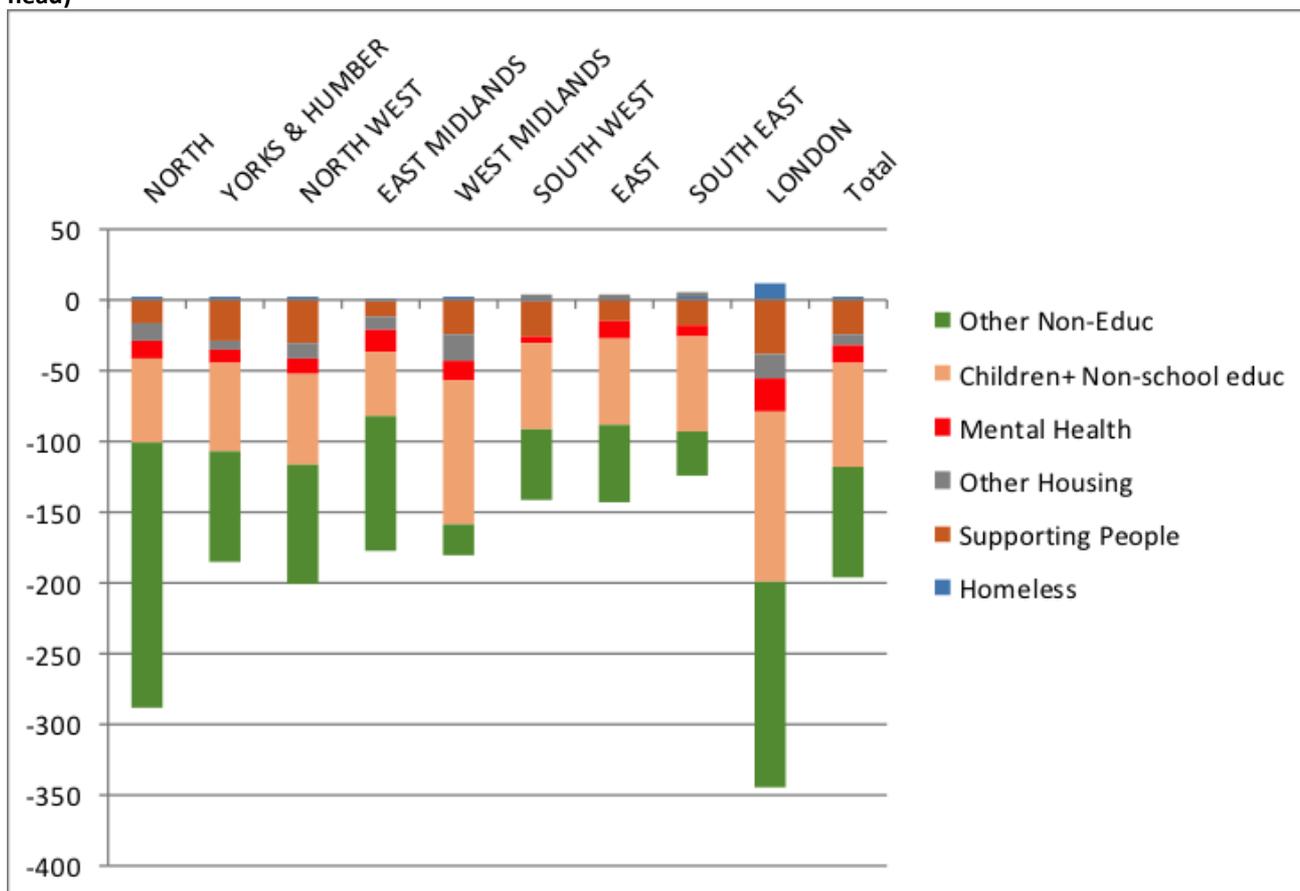
An even more pointed disparity appears when we look at the differential magnitude of cuts across the socio-economic spectrum. Figure 2 looks at the pattern across deprivation levels (using Indices of Deprivation Low Income Score quintiles). The most deprived areas suffered cuts in per capita spending resources 3.3 times larger than those suffered by the least deprived. While the per capita figures are particularly stark, the percentage change figures show a consistent story, with the most deprived areas losing 22% against 4% for the least deprived. As pointed out in Hastings et al (2017), this reflects a historic (and virtually unannounced) reversal of long standing principles of

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[8] Non-school education budgets used to fund a wide range of allied services and supports, including for special needs, poverty issues (e.g. school clothing), welfare, as well as adult education, music, etc. Partly because of devolution of budgets to schools, and then the academisation process, these budgets have seen disproportionate cuts.
[9] Local authority finance officers and council leaders would be quick to add that the true magnitude of cuts has been significantly greater than this because of real increases in costs and unavoidable increases in things like pension contributions.

'equalization' in local government finance in Britain, under which successive governments have recognised the significantly higher per capita spending needs of deprived urban areas.

Figure 2: Real terms cuts in Local Government expenditure per capita by relevant service by deprivation level of local authority, 2010-18 (£ per head)
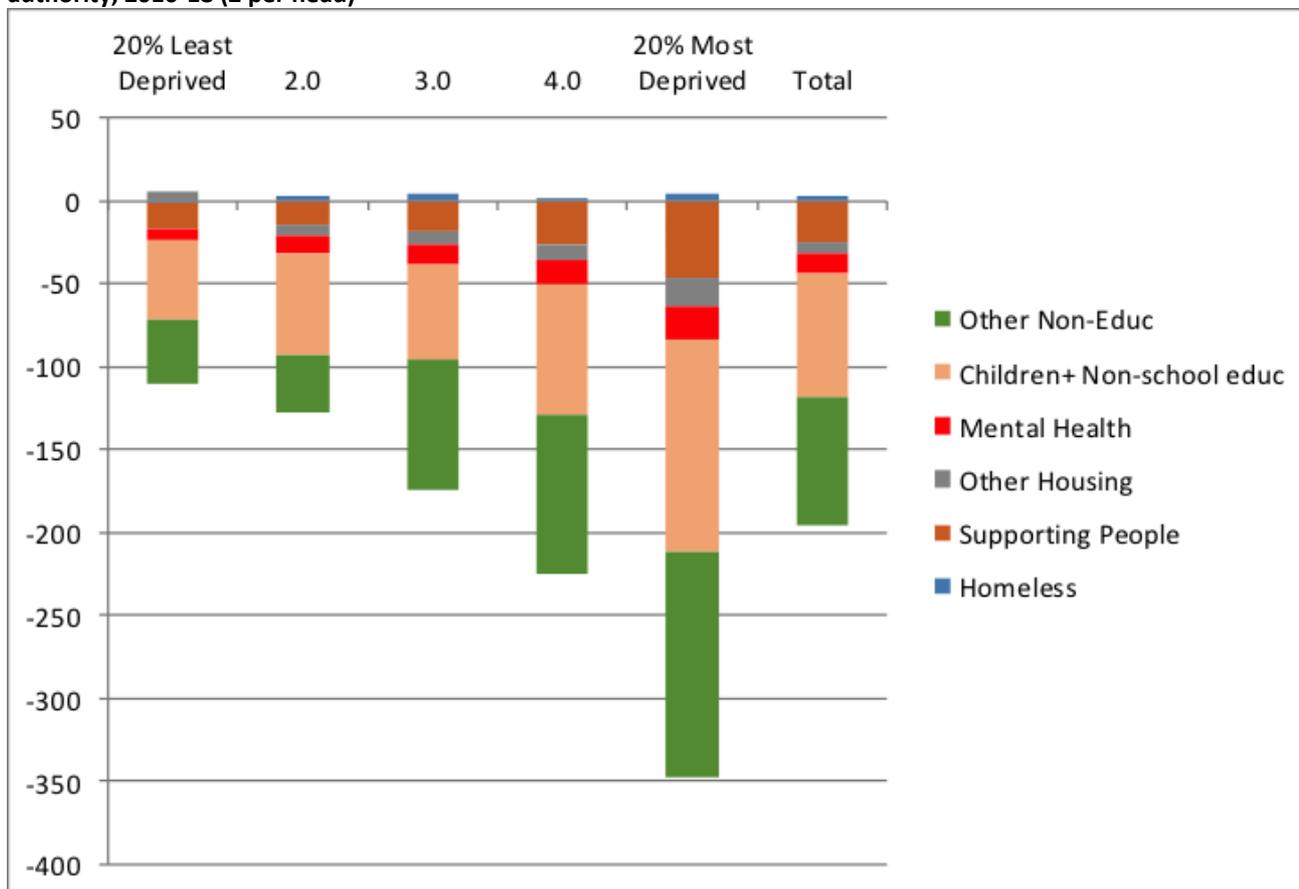
In terms of type of service area, the largest cut overall appears to have been in the category of children's services, including non-school education. Other non-education services, which cover a wide range of services falling outwith the other named categories, are second in the scale of cuts. Notwithstanding rhetoric about the need to enhance mental health services (Prime Minister's Office, 2017), these also experienced significant cuts in this period. On the housing front, the Government have given some priority to homelessness, through the mechanism of specific grants, but as these charts make clear this positive element is barely visible, and completely dwarfed by the relatively large cut in Supporting People (much of which targets homelessness) and cuts in other housing services.

Figure 3 presents a rather similar picture to Figure 2, this time profiling spending cuts across decile groups of destitution (on measures of destitution see Fitzpatrick et al, 2018a). This brings out more strongly the non-linear, increasing penalty (in spending power) paid by authorities with high levels of the most severe form of poverty. There appears to have been no attempt overall to protect services which one might expect to be more needed in such areas, whether for children, those with mental health problems, or the single homeless and other users of Supporting People.

Figure 3: Real terms cuts in Local Government expenditure per capita by relevant service by destitution level of local authority, 2010-18 (£ per head)
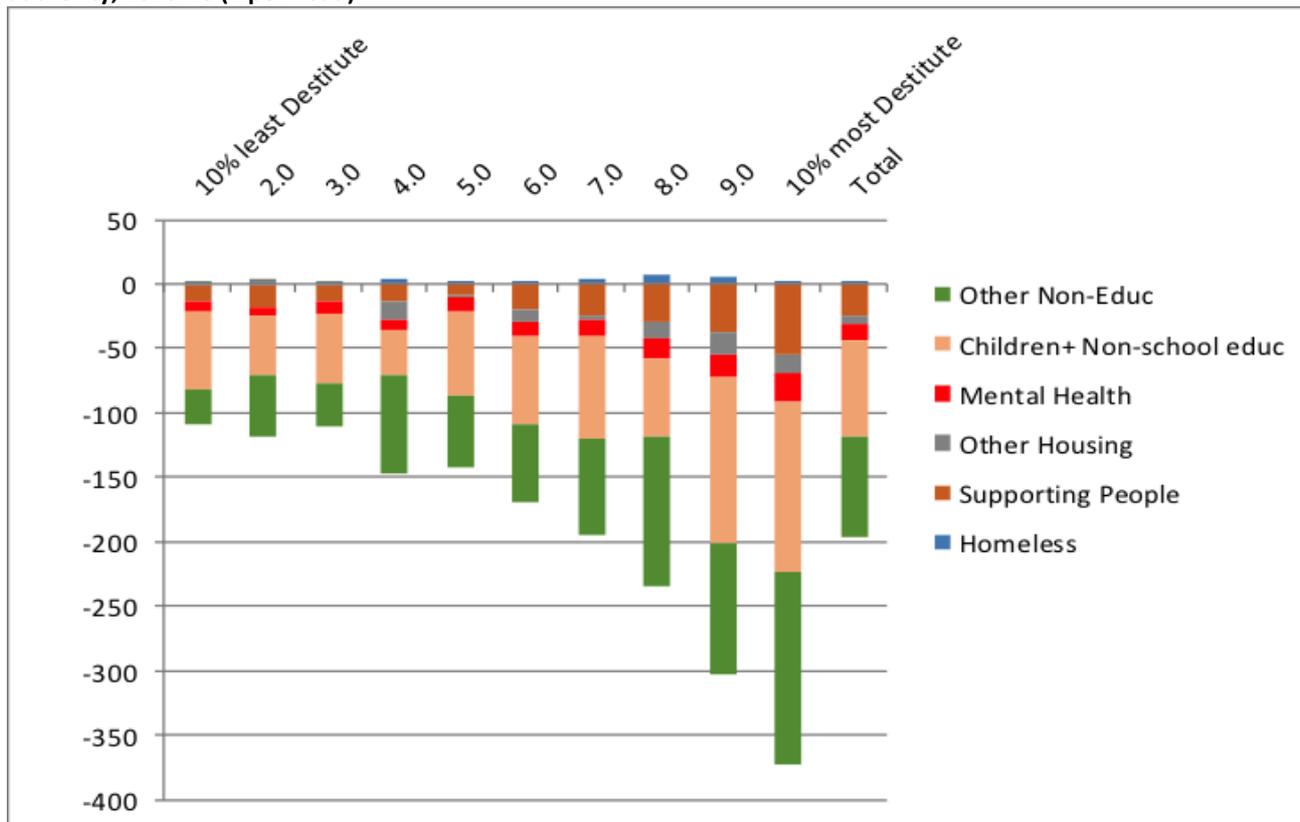
Figure 4: Real terms cuts in Local Government expenditure per capita by relevant service by level of complex need in local authority area, 2010-18 (£ per head)
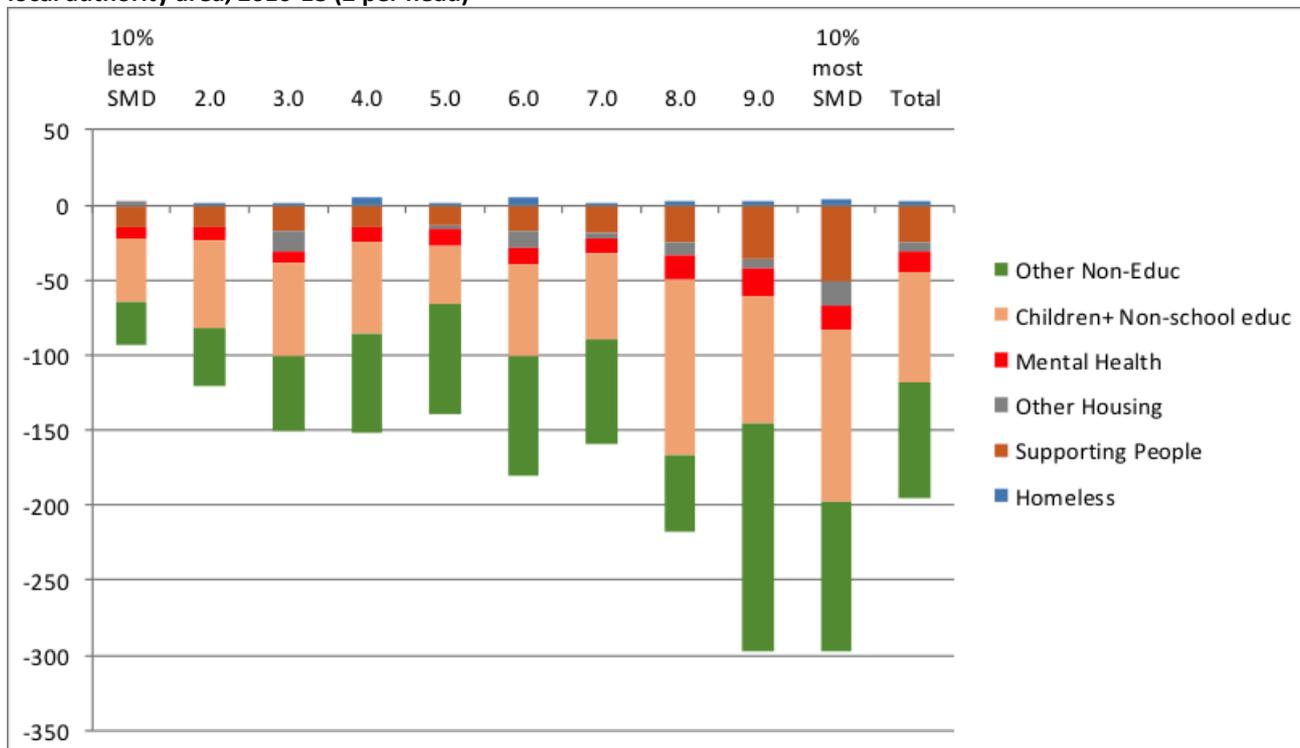
Figure 4 completes the picture by relating spending cuts to the intensity of complex needs ('Severe and Multiple Disadvantage', discussed below). Although the pattern presents less of a smooth curve, there is clearly a much higher level of cuts affecting the 20-30% of authorities most affected by these problems, and again Supporting People and mental health are prominent targets of these cuts.

These more general analyses prepare us for what to expect when we look at the cuts experienced by Newcastle and other core cities, as shown in Figure 5. It turns out that Newcastle is almost the worst affected of the core cities (Manchester and Central London being comparable). With real cuts of 32% or £461 per head, Newcastle is one of the very worst affected local authorities in England, with the third largest cut per capita among non-London unitary authorities. Only Salford and Manchester have been worse affected (although six London boroughs had larger cuts). There is quite wide variation among the core cities in the level of cuts, with Liverpool and Nottingham quite substantially affected, while by contrast Leeds and Sheffield appear to have experienced cuts at around the level of the national average. That Newcastle has been hard hit by austerity was felt keenly by local stakeholders who saw *"continuous cuts"* as a *"massive, massive challenge"* (social housing sector key informant (KI)). Frontline staff concurred, describing local authority services as "stretched to the limits" (frontline worker, homelessness prevention and response focus group).

Figure 5: Real terms cuts in Local Government expenditure per capita by relevant service by core city, 2010-18 (£ per head)
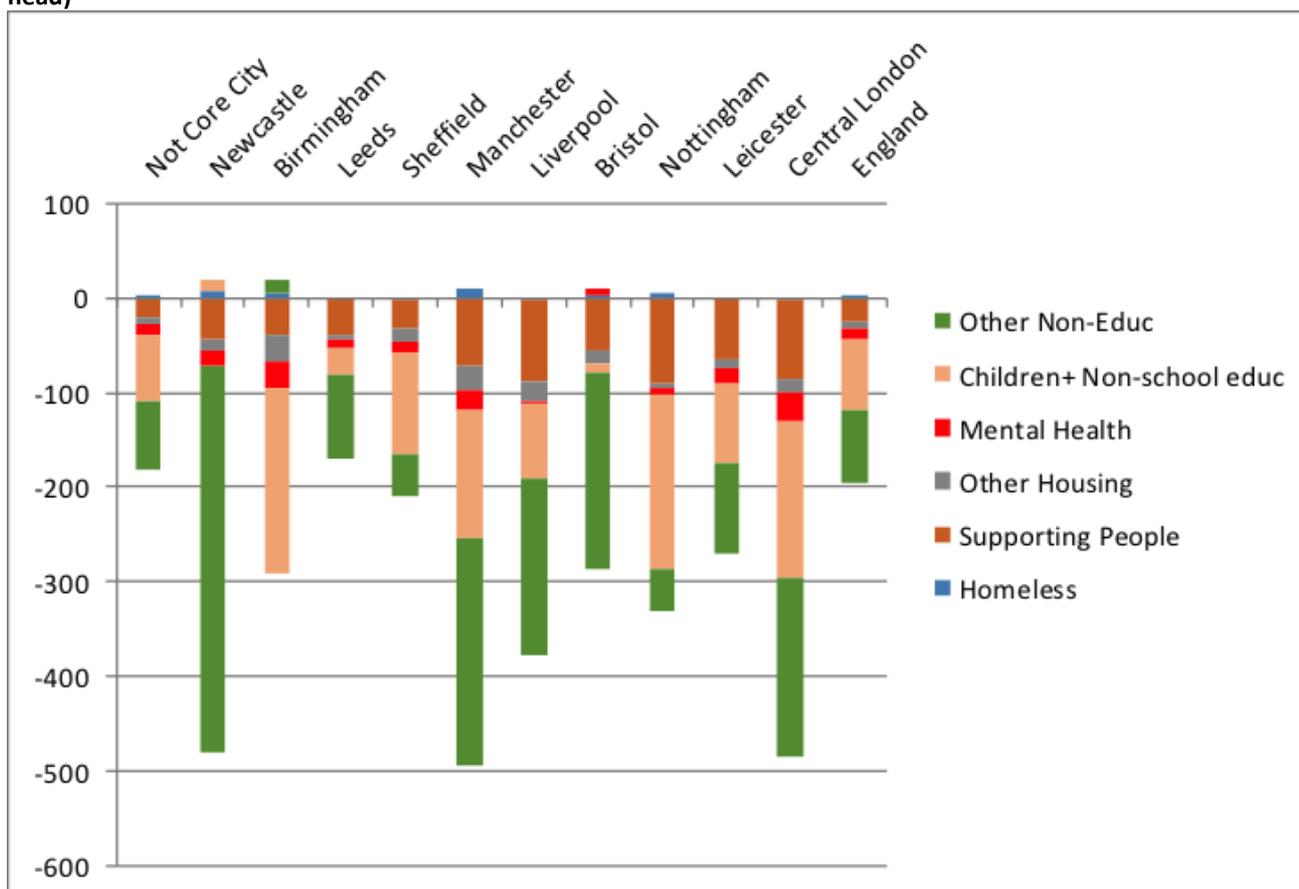

There clearly are also differences in the way local authorities have cut different services. Newcastle is noteworthy for not really cutting children's and non-school education budget at all (in fact there is a slight increase). In common with a handful of other core cities, Newcastle has seen some increase in spending on homelessness specifically since 2010, albeit at a very modest scale (£8 per head in real

terms) and facilitated in part by short-term additional funding like the Homelessness Prevention Trailblazer[10]. It has cut Supporting People quite a lot (-£43 per head) albeit less than a number of the other cities, and similarly, mental health services have been somewhat protected relative to other 'high cuts' core cities.

Cuts in Newcastle have overwhelmingly been concentrated in the 'other services' grouping. This broad category encompasses all local authority general fund services current expenditure not included as separate categories in the analysis. Nottingham presents a marked contrast from Newcastle in terms of how cuts of been distributed between service, with big cuts in children and non-school education, and in Supporting People, but very little cut in this broad 'other services' category.

Drilling down into the cuts made in this category in Newcastle over this eight year period, the biggest budget cuts have been made in central services (-£95 per head in real terms), with substantial cuts also in: highways and transport (-£24), adult social care for older people (-£21) or those with physical or sensory disabilities (-£20), recreation and sport (-£32), libraries (-£24), open space (-£22), culture and heritage (-£17), street cleansing (-£15), waste collection (-£9), crime reduction (-£12), other environmental regulation (-£26), economic development (-£27), community development (-35), and other planning (-£12).

Figure 6 extends the analysis to look at the scale of cuts in the local authorities immediately surrounding our core cities.

Figure 6: Real terms cuts in Local Government expenditure per capita by relevant service by core city and adjacent housing market areas, 2010-18 (£ per head)

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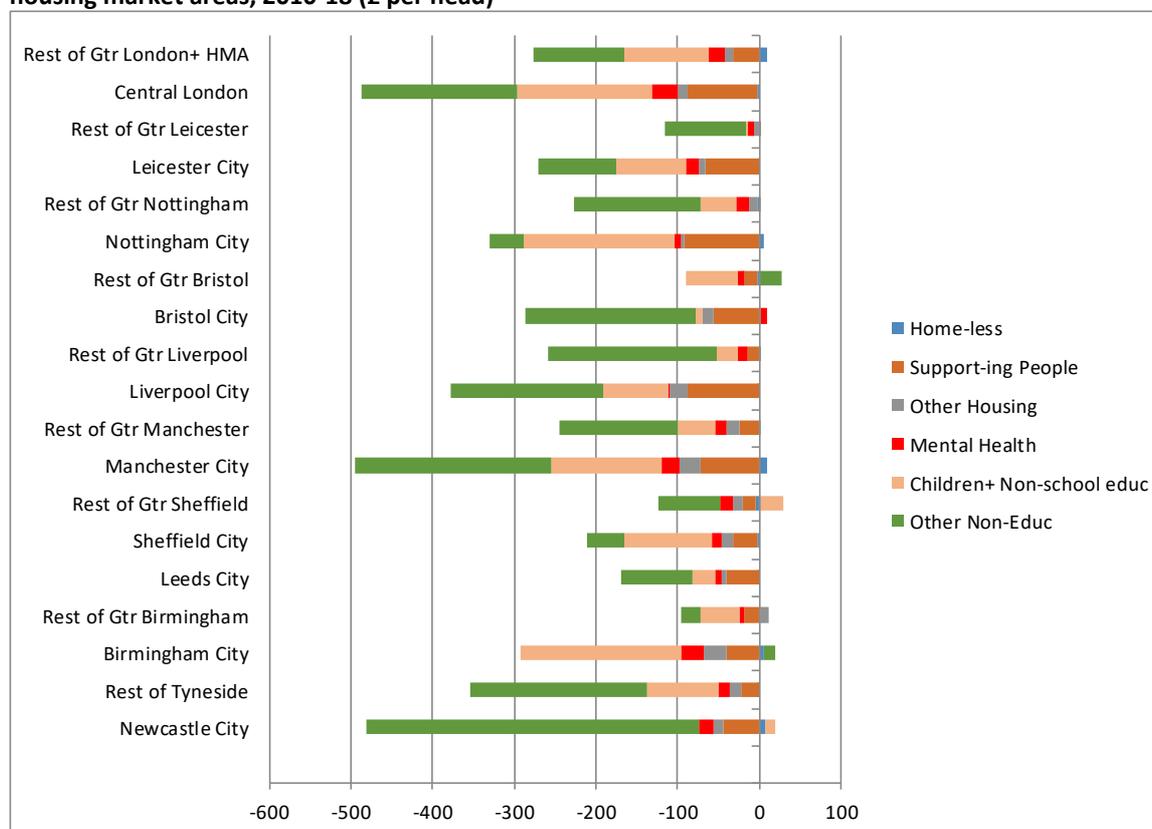
10 Note that the spending data reported here includes both core LA grant funding and additional short term funds (e.g. those dispersed through the Homelessness Prevention Trailblazer) falling within the relevant financial year period.

In every case, the adjacent authorities have cut spending by significantly less in per capita terms, although in the case of Newcastle (and Liverpool) the difference is less marked. The wider Tyneside authorities have not protected children and non-school education like Newcastle have.

It is worth noting that in some areas, previous cuts have been partially reversed in the last two years. This is true overall for five core cities and especially Birmingham and Manchester[11]. Trends in housing expenditure have switched from negative to positive in five cases, most notably in Manchester and Bristol[12], and Manchester has greatly expanded Supporting People again since 2016. In five city cases, including Newcastle (and England overall), the budgeted spend on mental health has gone from cut to growth[13].

The analysis presented here reveals that in context of very significant overall cuts, homelessness and some related service areas have been protected in Newcastle, in the sense of modest increases or cuts of an order less than other core cities. This statutory sector key informant described the broad approach that has been taken by the council, and in particular the city's reluctance to cut all non-statutory services:

"austerity has hit the council quite significantly and… we aren't able to do all of the things that we did 15 years ago... whilst we've got to have statutory support services for families in particular who are homeless, it isn't just about delivering what we've got to do, it's about doing things that are right for the most vulnerable people in our city." (Statutory sector KI)

Despite this positive message, key informants were clear that cuts had nevertheless impacted on homelessness services specifically, and services that play a role in preventing or resolving homelessness more generally. This local authority stakeholder explained the impacts on homelessness provision and infrastructure, highlighting the trade offs, hard choices and compensatory strategies that had been made, including between the quantity and quality of supported accommodation, and the burden on limited staff numbers:

"Our direct frontline homelessness assessment services were cut... in 2013... we lost things like tenancy relations services, we lost rough sleeping coordination, which puts greater burden on some of the officers that are left. I think a lot of the cuts have been mitigated by individuals working – I don't think it's an exaggeration to say, sometimes – maybe half as many hours again as they're paid for... We've retained our supported housing. But we've retained - rightly or wrongly... the number of beds and reduced some of the staffing, which has reduced the quality of the offer." (Statutory sector KI)

Other key informants, and frontline staff, highlighted the impacts of other (non-homelessness) services cuts on preventing homelessness in the city. The impact of cuts on welfare rights services in the city was a particular focus. While Newcastle City Council retains an 'in house' welfare rights team (reportedly unlike many other local authorities) its capacity has been reduced and previously commissioned third sector welfare rights services have lost funding, increasing the pressure on the in-house team:

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[11] Also to a smaller extent Leeds, Liverpool and Bristol
[12] Also to Leeds and Birmingham, and to a small extent Central London
[13] Other cases where Mental Health spending rose were Nottingham, Leeds, Bristol, and Central London

"we don't have as big a welfare rights team as we previously did, for example. Obviously, they have more work than they ever did, because more people are in need and benefits are more and more complex. There are things like that where we have managed to keep services where some of the councils haven't. That doesn't mean we've managed to keep the same level of service." (Statutory sector KI)

"across the city, generally, you had lots of provision, because, up until four or five years ago, you had legal aid, you had the pre-contact work it could claim for, for things like welfare rights, or debt. The [Bureau*] used to have three debt advisers, and a couple of welfare rights, and they had an employment person. Just gone overnight, and then, suddenly, it's the likes of us and other little bits and bobs on contracts elsewhere that have got to pick up the slack. You definitely notice that." (Frontline worker, homelessness prevention and response focus group)

Another area of cuts seen to have impacted negatively on homelessness prevention in Newcastle concerned reduced access to libraries, and the IT and internet infrastructure they provide for low income households. It was recognised that the council had done their best to preserve access and enhance IT support to residents to an extent (see chapter four), but in the context of the digitisation of welfare provision – and in particular Universal Credit – even a reduction in services was seen to be problematic:

"the loss of libraries with reduced opening hours, limited access… we've kind of just adjusted to that, but particularly with Universal Credit in mind, there are a lot of people who need that kind of IT support in their local community, and we've managed to keep them, but they are with restricted hours… in an ideal world where you're moving people on to a digital benefit, you definitely would have a more larger structure for dealing with that… NCC seem to have made fairly sensible decisions in trying to keep them open as best they can, but it's certainly not a seven-day-a-week service like we were used to" (Social housing sector KI)

"one of the problems that we've certainly seen is around access to IT because of the requirement everything's done digitally and certainly a lot of people don't have the wherewithal. They have communication difficulties, don't have the equipment [but] the council's been cutting libraries" (Third sector KI)

Relatedly, there were concerns that future cuts may necessitate further restrictions to 'in person' means of accessing advice or support (whether in person or by phone) and that this would have negative impacts for those with limited IT skills or who are have complicated or exceptional circumstances:

"in this round of budget cuts, they're looking at things like reducing their support to people. They talk about self-service which is basically using the internet. The thing about using the internet, it's fine a) if you can use the internet and b) you're not an exception. If you have a query which isn't easily resolved on the internet frequently asked questions sort of things, it's really hard to get to talk to somebody because they've gone for the self-support" (Third sector KI)

Welfare reform

It is generally understood that welfare reforms have negatively impacted on poverty and living standards, particularly in more deprived cities (Beatty and Forthergill, 2016), and that this may be

contributing to homelessness and destitution (Fitzpatrick et al, 2019, 2018a). We can actually map these impacts pretty well, thanks to the detailed work of Beatty and Fothergill, which enables impacts to be quantified for every local authority and year since 2010. In figures 7 and 8 we take the cumulative welfare reform impacts and stack them up on top of the local government budget cuts just described. This shows quite graphically the 'double whammy' that cities like Newcastle and Manchester are having to cope with.

Figure 7: Cuts in Local Government expenditure and Welfare Reforms per capita by core city, 2010-18 (£ per head)
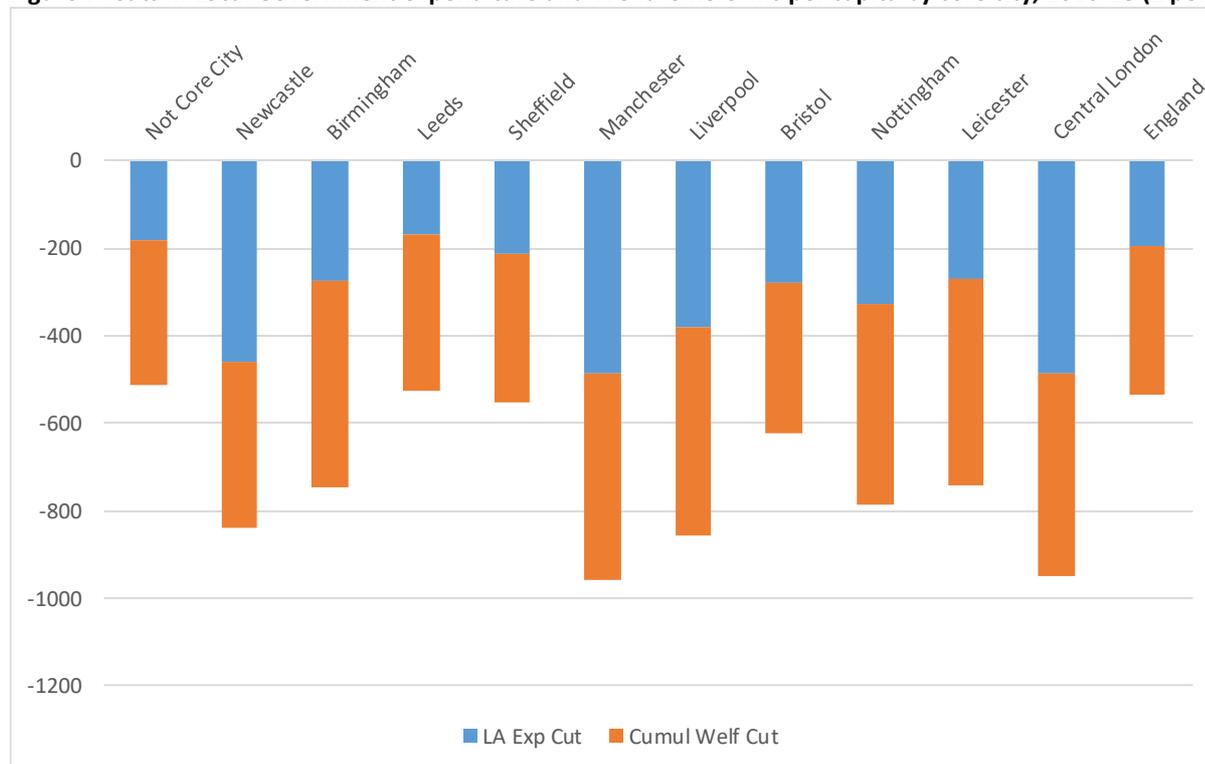
Once again, Newcastle appears to be receiving among the greatest impacts across the core cities (£838 per capita, around £2,100 per household), with only Manchester and Central London slightly greater. Leeds and Sheffield see losses of around the national average of £535, with Bristol only slightly greater than that. The balance between welfare and local government cuts varies, with Newcastle more affected by the latter, while the cumulative impact of welfare cuts is the greater factor in Birmingham, Nottingham and Leicester.

The sheer size of these combined cuts in the flow of public funds into these cities indicates that this could have quite a substantial impact on the size and growth of these local economies. The cuts shown in Figures 4 and 5 for Newcastle would be equivalent to about a 5% 'hit' on Gross Value Added (also known as Gross Domestic Product), the standard measure of the size of a regional economy. The actual impact would be larger once we allow for 'regional multiplier' effects (loss of second order recirculation of income and spending within the region) and the parallel effects of other cuts in capital spending and in other public sector services (e.g. DWP administration).

Figure 8 presents the equivalent analysis for both each core city and its adjacent HMA area. Newcastle is distinctive for showing a negative impact almost as great in the surrounding area. For most core cities, the impact on the surrounding areas is markedly less.

Figure 8: Cuts in Local Government expenditure and Welfare Reforms per capita by core city, 2010-18 (£ per head)
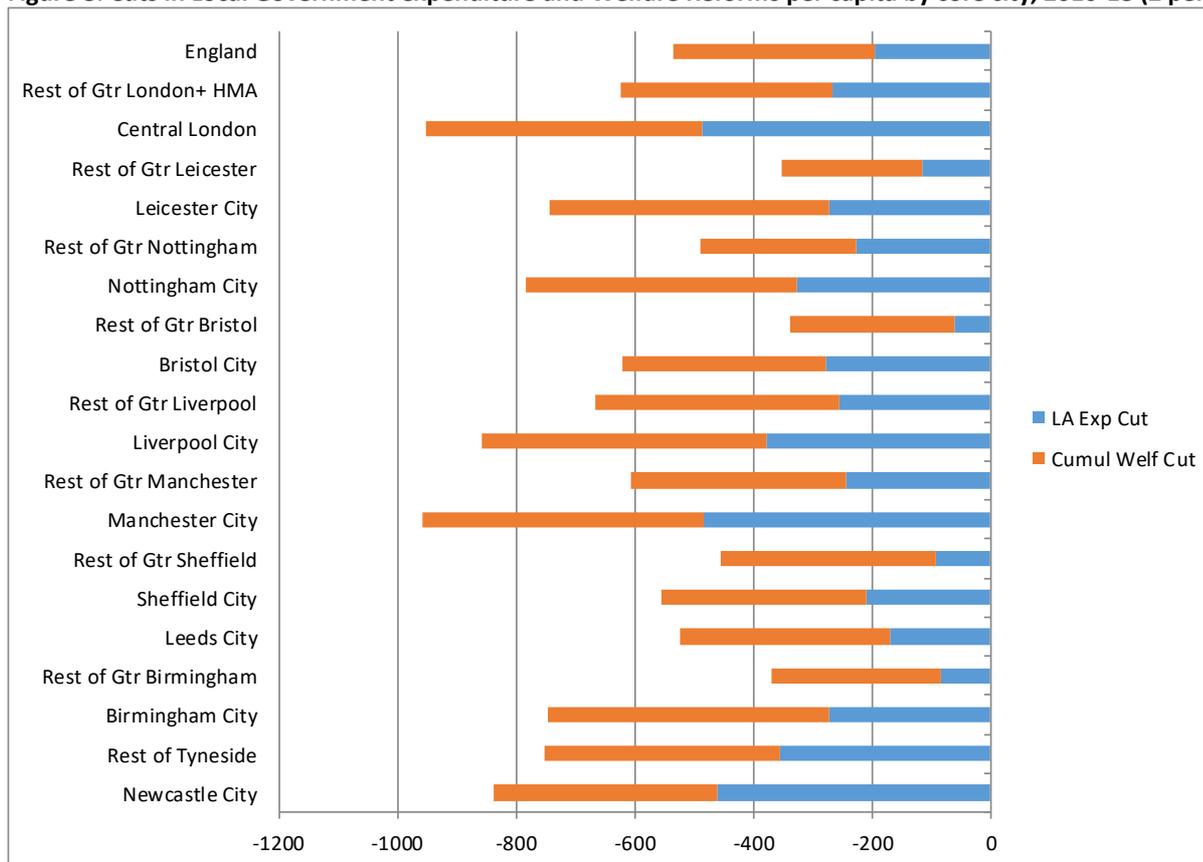
Key informants were clear that the cumulative impacts of welfare cuts – as well as other welfare reforms not included in the analysis above, like sanctions and Universal Credit (see Beatty and Fothergill, 2016) – have had a major impact on the incomes and financial wellbeing of Newcastle residents, putting them at higher risk of homelessness. Indeed, welfare cuts and reforms were identified as a key underlying causal driver of homelessness:

> "for most people, the reason they're in the position where they're going to become homeless is financial… people are struggling because of welfare cuts or sanctions to afford to keep a roof over their head" (Social housing sector KI)

> "I think we're just seeing an increase in people that are struggling because they just don't have enough money to meet their outgoings… We had a big spike… in people wanting to change their tenancies from furnished to unfurnished. They wanted to return their furniture packs and then get the goods that they had been paying for on a weekly basis provided through the Supporting Independence Scheme[14] because their Housing Benefit was no longer covering their payments. They were going deeper into arrears." (Statutory sector KI)

> "people are very much at risk of homelessness when they're in positions that could be loosely defined as destitute, largely because they've just the shortfall in their rent, basically, in the simplest form. They don't have enough money to pay their rent in a lot of cases, and the reason

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[14] See https://www.newcastle.gov.uk/services/housing/housing-advice-and-homelessness/what-do-if-you-need-housing-advice-or-are-3

they don't have a lot of money is because of welfare reforms that have come before" (Statutory sector KI)

Specific reforms highlighted by key informants as having a deleterious impact on households' income and thus increasing their risk of homelessness included the bedroom tax, the benefit cap, and the freeze on working age benefits including LHA. It was clear that these changes were having impacts across household types (see also chapter 6) and at the community level:

"the welfare reforms in general, not just because of the headline bedroom tax, benefit cap, LHA freeze, but the lack of upgrading [uprating] benefits. That's been the biggest change" (Statutory sector KI)

"the benefit cap has been quite difficult for our families… That has been quite tough to deal with" (Social housing sector KI)

"I've come across people living in two-bed houses on their own because their family's moved on and maybe their partner's died or left them or whatever. They don't want to leave because that's their family home and they're living in the front room, sitting under a duvet because they don't want to put their heating on. They're living on rations, essentially, of food because they're on such a low income. That's got to have a wider impact on communities... [and] I think we've seen more people abandon their properties as well. So they're panicked and thought, I can't afford it, so they've just left." (Social housing sector KI)

In this straitened context, households were characterised as extremely vulnerable where they face unanticipated or sudden demands on their expenditure or further decreases in their income. Benefit deductions addressing priority or public sector debts (especially under Universal Credit to cover previous tax credit overpayments, advance loans, court fines, or debts to 'third parties') were highlighted as an additional factor precipitating crisis (see also chapter 6 and Fitzpatrick et al, 2018a on this point):

"welfare reforms have caused [households] to fall into debt, particularly priority debt and public sector debts, which lead then to having to recoup that money through deductions, which then inhibits their ability to get by. Then it's just one financial shock, or some sort of cashflow issue can then trigger into a crisis." (Statutory sector KI)

An acute locus of concern regarding welfare reforms in Newcastle was the introduction and roll out of Universal Credit (UC). Newcastle was the first of the core cities to have 'full service' UC in all its Jobcentres, with over 19,000 residents on the new benefit by April 2019[15]. The specific issues seen to be associated with Universal Credit, and linking it to financial hardship and elevated risks of homelessness (see also Fitzpatrick et al, 2019), were manifold and included: the built in waiting time and resulting rent arrears; monthly payments and impacts on household budgets; scanning of tax credit overpayment records at UC sign up leading to high levels of deductions; and mistakes and misadministration meaning people frequently do not receive what they are entitled to. The specific mechanism linking these issues to potential homelessness was often that individuals could accumulate very high levels of arrears very quickly and often at the start of new tenancies:

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[15] Data retried from http://dwp-stats.maps.arcgis.com/apps/MapSeries/index.html?appid=f90fb305d8da4eb3970812b3199cf489 on May 21st 2019.

"people that have just gone on to Universal Credit… that can cause a lot of technical arrears on accounts where the beginning of a Universal Credit claim takes so long for the first payment to come through that actually somebody ends up with over £1,000 in arrears within months." (Social housing sector KI)

"Universal Credit has been a nightmare…. by five weeks many people are so hugely in debt that it's difficult to help them." (Statutory sector KI)

These acute challenges were seen to be extremely hard to effectively address, resolve or mitigate in the wider context of much reduced local authority budgets, with the added frustration that stakeholders were not confident that Central Government were learning from Newcastle's early experience of UC implementation:

"we still haven't mitigated all the worst aspects of Universal Credit. Yes, okay, we were coming from a place where we were well-prepared… However, you could have put every… bit of resource in. It does not mitigate the worst impacts of Universal Credit. It still doesn't, and it doesn't acknowledge that for the most vulnerable groups… Universal Credit doesn't work." (Social housing sector KI)

"We're an early adopter for Universal Credit. We now have the biggest food bank in Europe and the government ignore the fact that we've seen it and done it, and we can help them to learn from that, but they don't necessarily want to know… we've shared that learning but it isn't necessarily influencing practice." (Statutory sector KI)

Local stakeholders also voiced concerned about how 'managed migration' from existing benefits to UC due to start during Summer 2019 would be managed, foreseeing a host of negative issues, especially for vulnerable groups, including people not responding to requests, payments being suspended erroneously, and difficulties making online application (see NCC, 2018g). Frontline workers expressed concern about the demands this would place on existing support and advice services.

Taken together, the burden of managing the impacts of these cumulative welfare cuts and reforms was seen to have had important 'opportunity costs', directing time – both for the local authority and other partners – away from other potentially more valuable activities in relation to homelessness prevention, and beyond:

"with all these changes… we've had to take our foot off other things, I guess, to try and sort out these issues… work out how we're going to manage that and… help those people… we've spent a lot of time and money dealing with the problem that necessarily wasn't there before… unpicking these situations which are as a result of the government changes and reforms… if they weren't doing those things then maybe they could've done some more intensive support with our tenants… Maybe we wouldn't need as many staff and therefore we would've had more money in our pot to spend on neighbourhoods and regeneration-type things and looking after our properties" (Social housing sector KI)

"the very quick paced accumulative impact of all these different changes… the cost of having to put so much time and resource into preparing responses for that, helping residents understand, helping them respond to it, which is all time that could be spent doing other stuff as well, which would be much more forward-thinking" (Statutory sector KI)

Newcastle then has experienced a triple burden since 2010, facing amongst the most severe cuts in local authority budgets, among the worst impacted by welfare cuts, and one of the first areas to experience Universal Credit and its attended implementation and design challenges. All of these factors, separately and together, are seen to escalate the risks of homelessness faced by residents, and to constrain the ability of the local authority to prevent and respond to homelessness. On the other hand, this challenging context can also be seen to have increased the imperative to prevent homelessness and avoid the additional costs to local services, as well as to households themselves.

Housing market context

In this section we review some broad indicators of the state of and change in housing markets over the last decade, for Newcastle and comparable cities, beginning with broad trends and comparisons in relation to house prices, because moving on to market rent levels and key measures of social housing availability and demand. The worst point of the housing market slump associated with the Global Financial Crisis was around 2008/9, so it is appropriate to look at trends since then, as in Figure 9 which looks at house prices in real terms (discounting general Consumer Prize Index [CPI] inflation) for Newcastle and selected comparator cities.

Figure 9: Median Real House price by selected core city and England (£000, @2011 general price level)
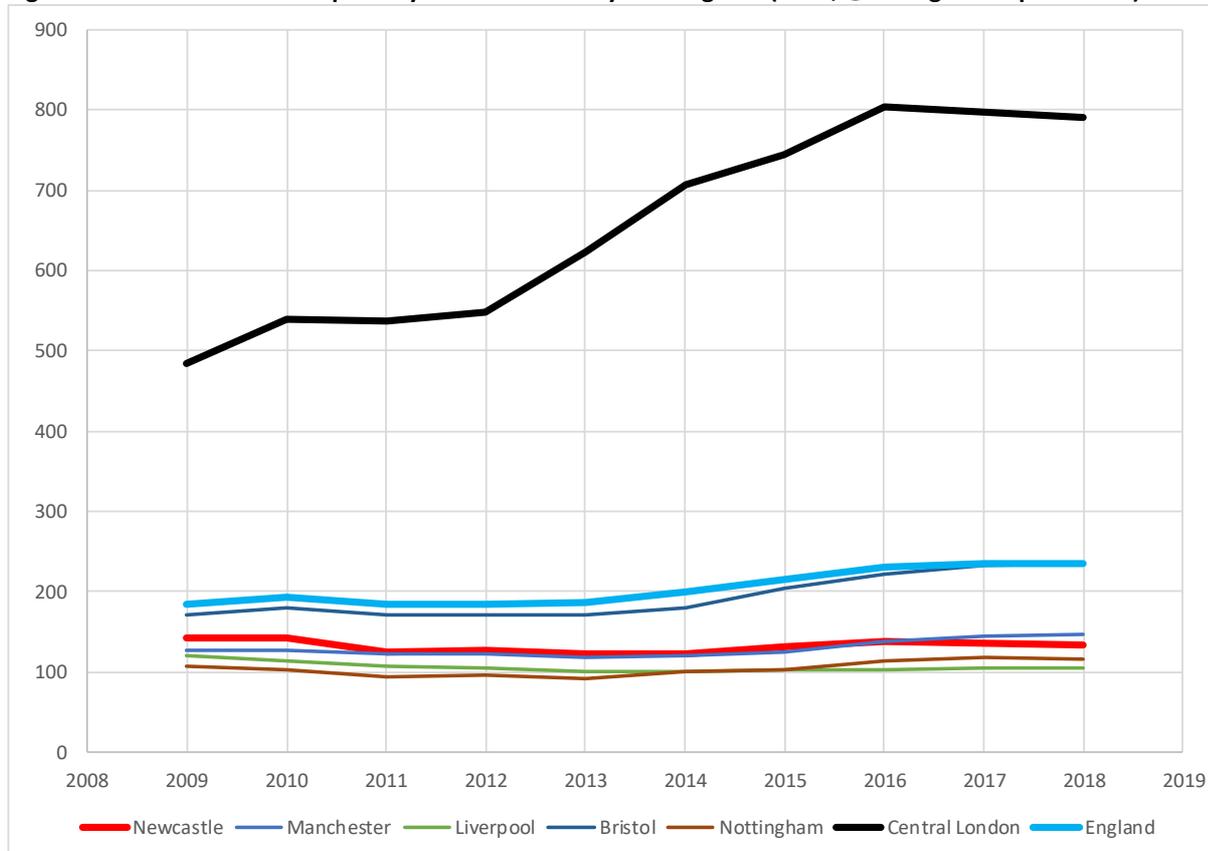
For Newcastle, as for many other core cities away from London, prices tended to fall or stagnate in real terms through the first half of the decade. After 2014, there was a slight recovery, although not yet back to 2009/10 levels for Newcastle. For some cities, such as Liverpool, there is a similar pattern

with even weaker recovery. For other core cities, such as Manchester and Birmingham, the recovery has been stronger, reaching a somewhat higher level than 2009. As a more prosperous southern city, Bristol has seen more pronounced growth to a significantly higher level than the northern cities. London as a whole, but particularly central London, represents a completely different picture. There was no real slump in prices in this period, although they marked time for a couple of years, before forging ahead to a level 66% above 2009 in 2016, edging back slightly to 63% in 2018[16].

These house price movements are indicative of pressure, or lack of pressure, in the housing market, which may affect the risks of homelessness in various ways. Higher prices make for worse housing affordability, in general, but this also depends on trends in and pattern of earnings and people's job prospects and security. General market affordability has a strong bearing on the ability of younger households to buy, but the relevant group here are not at high immediate risk of homelessness. Sharp market downturns, especially if associated with raised interest rates, can put more homeowners at risk, as in the early 1990s, but problems of repossessions and negative equity have been largely avoided in recent years, and mortgage lenders are required to show more forbearance. Perhaps of most direct relevance to homelessness, house prices are likely to feed through to private sector rent levels sooner or later, and affordability/access problems for would-be home buyers can knock on through pressures in the private rental market, which may tend to displace more economically marginal groups.

However, as Figure 10 shows, the story with market rents is more one of stability than change in this period. Even in London, where capital values of housing have soared, rents have not moved significantly in real terms overall, although there was some fluctuation around 2013/14. In Newcastle, rents have changed little, in effect, with a slight decline to 2013, and a slight uptick in 2016, which was not sustained. Birmingham and Manchester saw a slight decline, followed by a rise of 5-10% in real terms since 2014, with Bristol showing a stronger real rise of 32% over those five years. Other core cities are more like Newcastle in showing relative stability.

Private market rents in this period have risen less than expected. One explanation is that, although demand for private renting has risen (a bigger population, economic recovery, greater difficulty of accessing home ownership), the supply of lettings has actually grown as much or more, so leading to less pressure on rents. It is questionable whether this elastic supply (of buy-to-let investment in existing stock) will continue to the same extent in the future, as recent tax changes and potential regulatory measures bite. The policy issues around 'generation rent' are important, but they primarily reflect the greatly increased size of the sector (Rugg and Rhodes, 2018). There are also important implications relating to the sector's role accommodating middle-income families and adults, and issues to do with lack of tenure security and poorly regulated standards relevant across household types and the age spectrum.

To understand these dynamics, we can also bring in *affordability indicators* derived as part of recent research for Crisis and the National Housing Federation to estimate housing requirements for lower income households and homeless people. At local authority level we have a proxy-based model of local income distributions, which we use to relate the incomes of younger households (aged under 40) to threshold market rent levels for different sizes of household. This model indicates that in

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[16] The London housing market shows more weakness at the time of writing, but this may be affecting mainly the top end of the market and the central boroughs.

2015[17] around 37% of younger households across England could not comfortably afford to rent in the market on the basis of their income level[18]. In general, for core cities the proportions unable to afford market rent are higher, ranging from a worst case of central London (85%) down to a best case of Leicester (30%). The proportion estimated for Newcastle is 43%, indicating that it is more affordable for young households to rent in the city than in seven other core cities, those being Bristol (where the equivalent figure is 58%), Manchester (53%), Nottingham, Birmingham, and Liverpool (44-45%). In all of these cases the core city is worse than its surrounding region.

Figure 10: Real Market Rents in Selected Core Cities and England, 2009-2018 (Median weekly rent [£], 2 bedroom home)
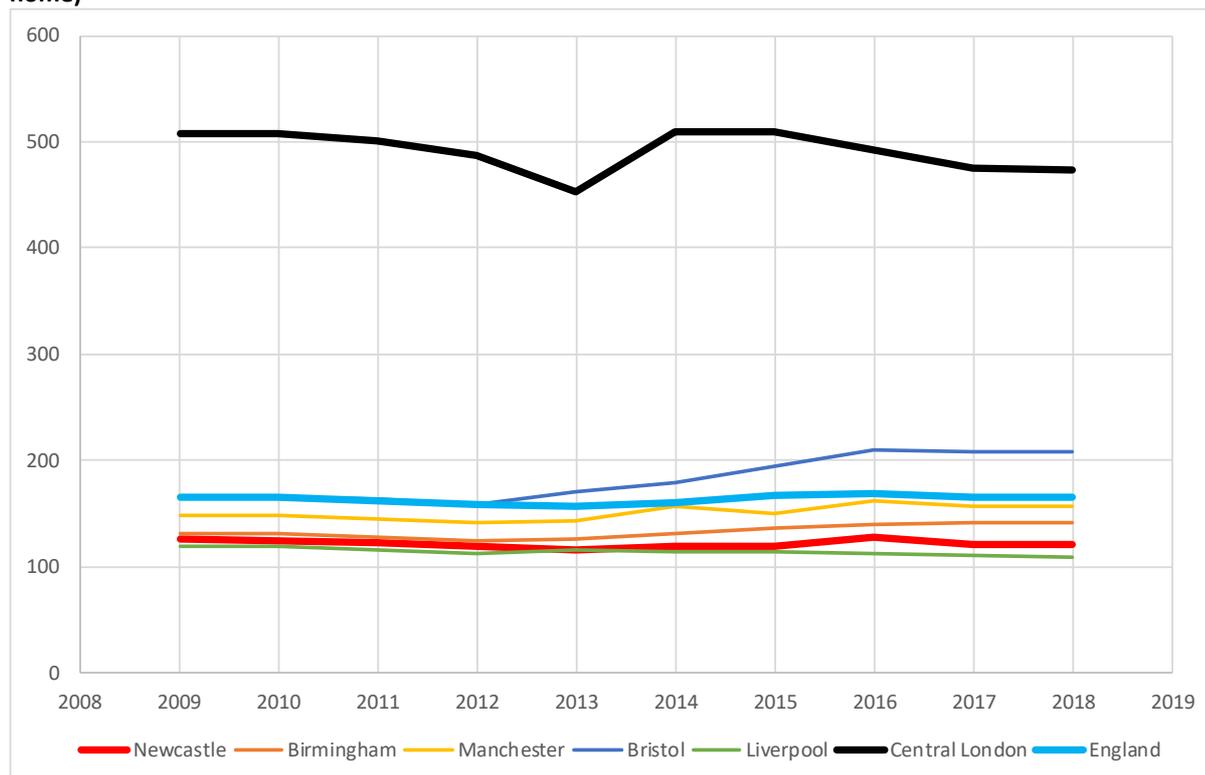
Of course, one of the fundamental determinants of housing outcomes, particularly for poorer and more vulnerable groups at risk of homelessness, is the supply of social housing in the locality where they live. This is as important as factors on the demand side, like demographics and affordability, and there are quite large differences between regions and localities in the levels of supply of social rented housing.

By social renting supply we mean primarily the annual flow of social rented housing units available for letting to new tenants. This comprises two elements, the smaller of which is lettings of newly built or acquired units, and the (much) larger of which is the flow of 'relets' which become available as existing tenant households move out (into other tenures, areas, joining other households, or into care homes). Social renting here includes both local authority and housing association (or Registered Social Landlord) lettings, including those let on 'Affordable Rents' as well as those on 'Social Rents'. Newcastle retains a stock of over 25,000 council homes, managed on behalf of the city council by the

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[17] The base year for the analysis given the availability of relevant data on household income from the Understanding Society survey.
[18] Based on the local authority level model reported in Bramley (2018 and forthcoming). This is before any adjustments to reflect access to wealth and savings.

Arms Length Management Organisation (ALMO) Youth Homes Newcastle (YHN), with around 15 housing associations also operating in the city[19]. Overall data on these lettings are compiled annually at local authority level[20].

Figure 11 shows trends since 2012 by core city and for England. Certain important conclusions can be drawn from this figure. Firstly, Newcastle is strikingly better placed than all of the other core cities in having a consistently higher rate of social lettings. This rate is about double that of most of the northern core cities, about three times the English average and the rate for some more pressured core cities, and four times the rate in central London. Secondly, this rate has maintained its level in Newcastle, with modest fluctuations, over the last five years, whereas in most of the comparator areas rates have been trending downwards.

Figure 12 complements 11 by showing the regional trends in this indicator. This shows that the relatively favourable position of Newcastle is in part a regional effect. Indeed, there is a pronounced North-South gradient in terms of levels of social lettings, but it should be noted that the South East has as low a level as London. Housing market areas surrounding core cities tend to have somewhat lower lettings rates than their urban core, and this is the case in Tyneside/Newcastle[21].

Figure 11: Social lettings rate by core city by year, 2012-17 (percent of households)

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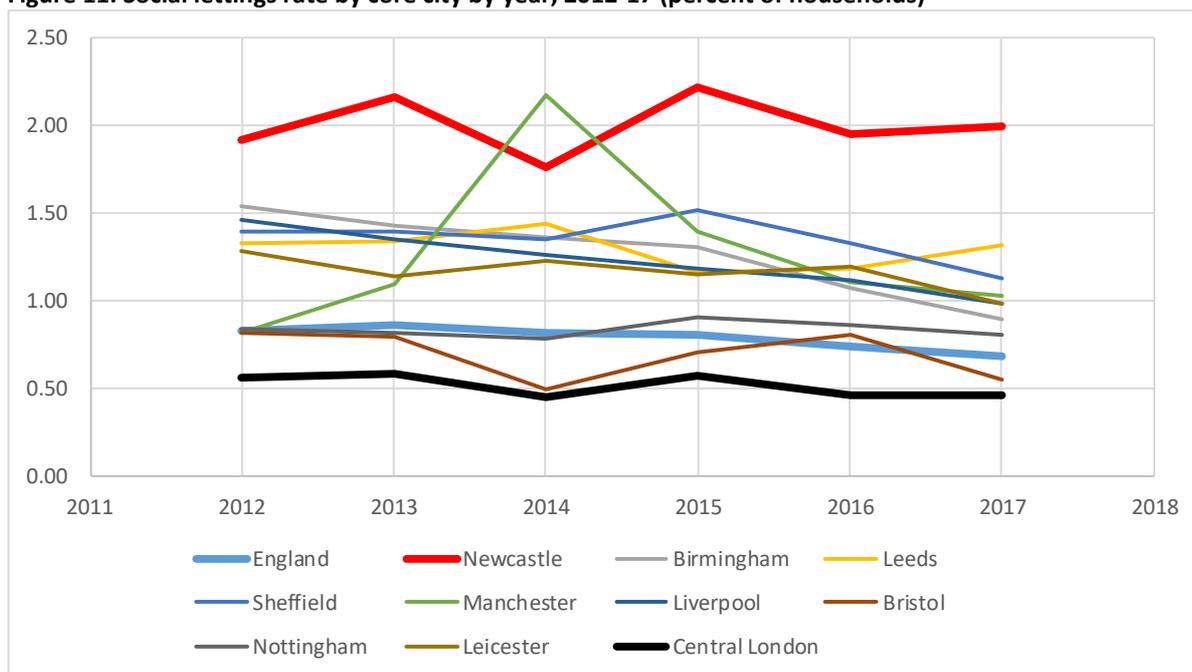
[19] See www.newcastle.gov.uk/services/housing/council-housing-and-affordable-homes/housing-associations

[20] Although the current data returns are not as convenient as they were in the past. The Local Authority Housing Statistical Return gives a direct figure for Local Authority lettings to new tenants ('new to social housing'), but only a 'nominations' figure for housing associations: we use a regional mark-up factor to link local nominations to estimated total RSL lets to new tenants, based on UK Housing Review published regional numbers.

[21] Despite this general trend, in several cases the rates are similar (Sheffield, London) or even rather higher (Liverpool).

Figure 12: Social lettings rate by region by year, 2012-17 (percent of households)
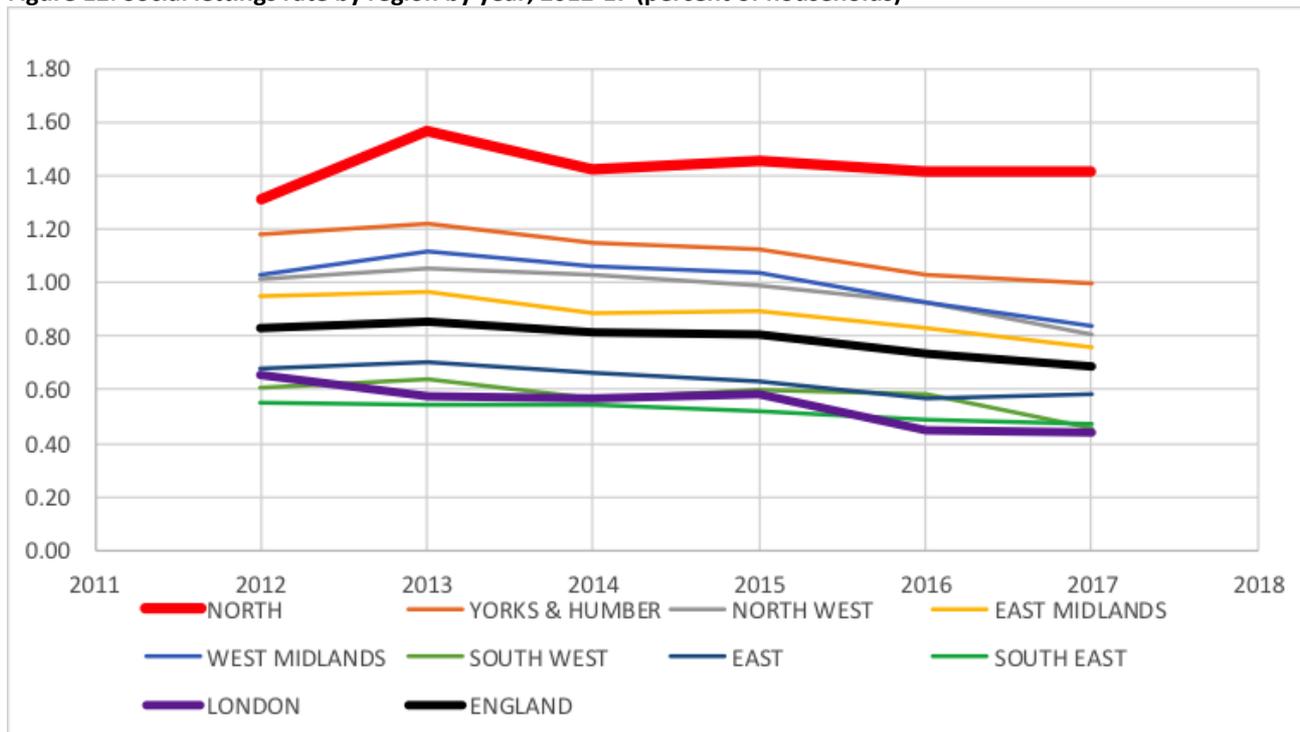
Lettings supply rates can vary for a number of reasons and some combination of these factors can be understood to explain Newcastle and the wider region's position in figures 11 and 12:

- Authorities with a larger social rented stock will have more lettings relative to total household population;
- Authorities with active new housebuilding programmes for social housing (by LA or HAs) will have more lettings;
- Concentrations of certain demographic groups within the tenant population can drive higher relet rates (e.g. the very old, younger working households);
- Easier housing market conditions make it more likely households will move out, whether into home ownership or private renting;
- Areas with declining economies may see more out-migration;
- Neighbourhoods with social and environmental problems can generate high relet rates.

Our sub-regional housing market model has a statistical prediction model for relet rates (the main part of lettings). Some of the stronger influences in this model are house prices (negative, i.e. higher prices reduce relets), unemployment (negative), single adult households (positive), crime (positive).

Clearly, a high supply of social lettings is expected to both reduce the incidence of homelessness and to make it easier for local authorities to respond to homelessness, both via formal rehousing duties under homelessness legislation, but also through the use of some lettings as temporary accommodation (in preference to less suitable forms like B&B) and prevention activities. Indeed, social landlords are uniquely well placed to prevent homelessness among their existing tenants and will be privy to early signs of risk via arrears levels. Statistical models developed to predict aspects of 'core homelessness', discussed at greater length below, showed that social lettings supply had a

significant influence in reducing rates of sofa surfing, homeless priority need acceptances, and use of TA.

As such, and given the wider analysis offered in this section, Newcastle's relative position in terms of housing market dynamics, and especially social housing supply, can be considered a propitious one in the context of homelessness prevention, something recognised by key informants. Key factors highlighted included the general housing supply picture in the city, rent levels that are lower than elsewhere in the country (and in particular London and the Southeast), and the fact that Newcastle City Council retains control of a large stock of social housing via its ALMO YHN:

> "I don't think we have a massive housing problem here. Obviously we have a problem with people being homeless but we don't have long, long lists of people needing to move into properties and things." (Social housing sector KI)

> "we have a bit of a housing surplus, our rents are quite low generally so if you compare that to somewhere like London or the Southeast, you'd have a different situation there. I don't know if what we're doing [on homelessness prevention] would necessarily work in those areas because there might be other factors that limit how easy it is for people to get accommodation." (Statutory sector KI)

> "[the] housing market makes a difference, because we've got what we would call a more balanced housing market rather than the overheated housing markets of London and the South East… we still have a subset of people who either struggle because of personal reasons or because of the misalignment of the benefit system from the housing system… [but the] housing market does have an impact. I think we are fortunate to have one single landlord. Other authorities have got masses of different housing associations… I hear from colleagues in [other core city] how difficult it is to join that up." (Statutory sector KI)

That being said, stakeholders identified remaining challenges. As the last quoted key informant comments in the passing, welfare reforms have generated gaps between rent levels and income for even those residing in social housing. This voluntary sector key informant agreed that rent is unaffordable for some groups: *"the majority of people who present, the reason for their homelessness is because they can't afford [the rent]… Even though in the North East, housing is allegedly affordable, it still isn't affordable enough to be sustainable"* (Third sector KI). Two further challenges are highlighted here. First, it was acknowledged that while overall housing supply, and social housing supply specifically, were adequate, especially in relation to other cities, the 'fit' of that stock to local needs remains a challenge, with some kinds of properties and locations less desirable – and conducive to resident flourishing – than others, with potential issues for tenancy sustainment:

> "Some of it is the stock that is available is not what people necessarily want. A lot of the void properties in the city are in the low-rise or high-rise flats… two and three beds… because of the bedroom tax there are still affordability issues… they're often not in the most desirable [areas] and that's why they're vacant to some degree. There isn't the infrastructure there to get people into jobs or wherever it is that they need to reconnect to." (Third sector KI)

Second, while the overall availability of social lets was acknowledged not to be a problem in Newcastle, key informants and frontline workers highlighted that *access* to that stock for particular

kinds of households can be extremely difficult given the use of affordability checks and other restrictive allocations practices that act to exclude those with particular issues from social tenancies. The focus here was especially on those with complex needs, or those whom for other reasons (e.g. a history of arrears, low income) there were concerns about tenancy sustainment, behaviour or affordability/arrears. These issues are considered in more depth in chapter seven.

Labour market conditions

Households ability to meet their needs in the housing market will also depend strongly on their employment situation, and their ability to stay in employment or find alternative work if their current job ends. Therefore, unemployment rates and other labour market indicators are important in understanding homelessness risk and the potential of employment related support as part of homelessness prevention activity. Figure 13 looks at the unemployment picture for core cities over the last decade.

Figure 13: Unemployment Rates by Core City and England 2009-18 (ILO unemployed seeking work, percent of working age population)
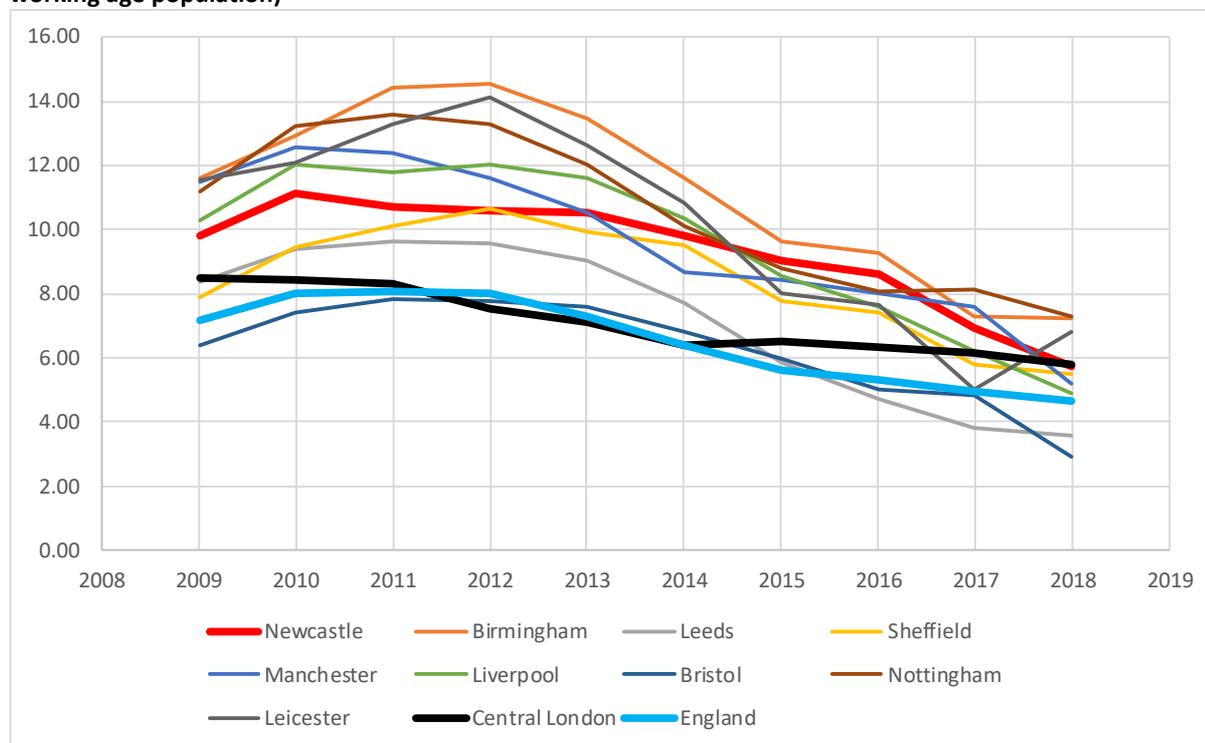
In 2009, in the midst of the Global Financial Crisis, Newcastle's unemployment rate was 10%, compared with 7% across England. Five of the other listed core cities had higher rates at that time, up to 12%. For some of this group high unemployment persisted for another three years or so, peaking at over 14% in Birmingham for example. For Newcastle, rates came down gradually from 2010, but the decline was slower than in many other cities and parts of England, until 2016. After that, unemployment fell rather faster in Newcastle, leaving it in 2018 in the middle of the pack, actually very close to central London, Sheffield and Manchester.

Government boasts of record low unemployment and job numbers, but unemployment rates are not as low as in the 1960s and early 1970s, and 'real' unemployment (including working age people classified as ill or disabled) are high in a lot of areas, including core cities like Newcastle (Beatty et al, 2017). It is therefore of value to look also at employment rates as proportions of resident populations

of working age. This rate stood at 75.3% across England in 2018, up 4.8% points since 2010. Newcastle's rate also rose by 4.8% points in this period, but its level remained well below the national average at 67.3%, although part of this was clearly a regional effect as the North as a whole stood at 70.7%, and the Rest of Tyneside only reached 71.9%. Other relatively poor performing core cities included Nottingham (60.3%, only 3.4% up on 2010) and Leicester (64.6%, only 2.6% points up). Much stronger employment rates – and growth patterns – are seen in Manchester (69.1%, up 10.4%), Leeds (77.1%, up 8.6%), and Bristol (78.9%, up 6.9%).

While government and other commentators repeat the mantra that work is the best route out of poverty, a range of evidence suggests that this is not always the case, that increasingly the poor are working households, and that all is not well in the world of work[22]. There has been growing concern about the loss of stable permanent jobs with good pay and working conditions and the growth of casual, part-time, 'flexible employment' and 'self-employment', often on low or sub-minimum wages. These tendencies may be more pronounced in some local labour markets than others.

Table 1 tries to tease out an indicator of these issues by looking at typical pay for workers in the middle of the distribution (the median) and those towards the bottom (the lowest tenth, or decile), across all those in paid work as captured in the governments Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings. Whereas we have traditionally measured the earnings of full time workers, this measure combines full and part time and reflects variations in both hourly pay and actual hours worked.

Table 1: Earnings indicators for all resident workers by Core City and England, 2009-2018 (median and lower decile weekly earnings of all full and part time workers)

Core City	Median	Lowest decile	Median	Lowest Decile
Newcastle	431.9	125.3	-1.5%	-17.0%
Birmingham	429.8	140.9	-6.0%	4.7%
Leeds	458.0	145.1	-3.6%	-1.4%
Sheffield	427.2	140.1	-3.5%	-1.6%
Manchester	419.4	124.8	-5.7%	1.9%
Liverpool	436.0	141.7	-0.8%	11.4%
Bristol	469.5	148.7	-1.2%	9.3%
Nottingham	383.3	121.3	-7.5%	-7.7%
Leicester	371.0	136.8	-7.8%	0.0%
Central London	704.2	201.0	-9.9%	-18.4%
England	469.3	147.6	-4.7%	-1.1%

In terms of levels, the median worker in Newcastle earned £432 per week gross in 2018, which was £37 below the national median. It was marginally above three other core cities and well above one other (Nottingham), while being below two others and miles below Central London's £704. Looking at the lowest earning tenth of workers, Newcastle looked significantly worse off, at £125 per week, similar to Manchester and Nottingham but £15-20 worse than any of the other cities, and £22 below England overall. The real terms changes since 2009 look particularly adverse for people at the bottom end of the earnings distribution in Newcastle, although less so for those in the middle. Median

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[22] See for example evidence from the 'Poverty and Social Exclusion Survey' (Bramley & Bailey 2018), Standing (2014) or many publications from the Resolution Foundation.

earnings fell by 4.7% in real terms across England (indicative of the general crisis of living standards), but only fell by 1.5% in Newcastle, albeit from an already relatively low level. However, for the lowest decile, earnings in Newcastle fell by 17%, compared with only a 1.1% fall across England. The only other core city with such a big proportional fall was Central London, but starting from a much higher absolute level. In today's money, the lowest earning group in Newcastle lost £26 per week over the period, leaving them with only £125 per week of earnings before any deductions.

This very poor situation facing low earning workers may reflect a combination of very low hourly pay and low/falling/intermittent hours of work. It could leave many people, particularly in single earner households, vulnerable to serious poverty, financial problems or destitution, particularly if or when the tax credit/welfare benefit system fails to pick up the problem. In this challenging employment and earnings context in Newcastle, key informants were critical of Central Government's failure to put greater efforts into labour market reforms at the same time as it retracted the welfare safety net based on the rhetoric of 'work being the best route out of poverty' (see chapter 7 for more on this). Indeed, evoking greater concern among our key informants than these clear issues of low earnings in Newcastle, were issues relating to those far away from the labour market. It is to such groups with complex needs that we turn in the final section of this chapter, following the next section's exploration of poverty, severe poverty and destitution in the city.

Severe poverty and destitution

Given clear and strong links between poverty and homelessness (Bramley and Fitzpatrick, 2018), understanding the incidence of various kinds and measures of low income in an area is central to understanding the incidence of homelessness and levels of homelessness risk there. Looking at standard indicators of poverty, Newcastle is clearly a relatively poor city, but not the poorest among the core cities. Using the Low Income Score measure in the 2015 edition of the Indices of Deprivation, Newcastle has a poverty rate of 19.4% and is ranked sixth poorest among the 10 core cities, behind Liverpool, Birmingham, Manchester, Nottingham and Leicester. Using the 'employment score' Newcastle ranks fifth, just ahead of Leicester. Some care is needed with such measures as they are affected by boundaries, by the economic status of the wider sub-region and the relative status of the 'core' versus the surrounding areas. So, for example, Leeds is a very generously-bounded city, whereas by contrast Nottingham is not.

It can be seen, using low income and employment scores, that Newcastle is unusual among core cities (except Sheffield) in having adjacent 'Rest of Housing Market Areas' with poverty or employment scores which are as bad as, or worse, than the core city. By contrast, the other core cities tend to have much worse scores than their surroundings (their surrounding areas are much better off). This may lead to higher levels of inward movement into Newcastle than in cities with better off peripheries, as households seek to make use of the opportunities (for services, employment etc.) perceived to be or in fact offered by the urban area. Two key informants noted this dynamic in Newcastle, commenting that the city has *"quite porous borders and a lot of shared clients and customer groups"* (Third sector KI) with neighbouring local authorities, with another highlighting in particular the *"to-ing and fro'ing"* (Third sector KI) of young people between Newcastle and nearby areas.

Destitution is the most extreme form of poverty and has recently been subject to measurement across the UK in two studies for the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (Fitzpatrick et al, 2018a). The more recent study generated estimates of levels of destitution for all local authorities in Britain, by

combining bespoke surveys conducted in 16 localities with an analysis of secondary indicators which, taken together, provide a reasonable indication or prediction of likely destitution levels. The definition of destitution in this study was developed in the predecessor study (Fitzpatrick et al 2015) and rests on criteria of lacking basic threshold levels of two or more key essentials (shelter, food, heating, lighting, clothing and footwear, and basic toiletries), and/or having an extremely low income and therefore clearly unable to afford them. The parameters of this definition were shown to be supported by clear majorities of the UK adult population.

The *Destitution in the UK* studies distinguish three sub-groups in the population experiencing destitution: (1) migrants (born overseas, but not with complex needs) (2) people with complex needs[23] (including migrants); (3) other UK-born people. The published report presents tables showing the 'decile' position of each local authority in relation to each of the three sub-group categories of destitution, as well as the overall destitution level (the deciles divide local authorities, weighted by population, into ten equal sized groups). Figure 14 shows the destitution decile status of each of the core cities.

Figure 14: Destitution Decile position of Core Cities for Three Sub-Categories and Overall, 2017
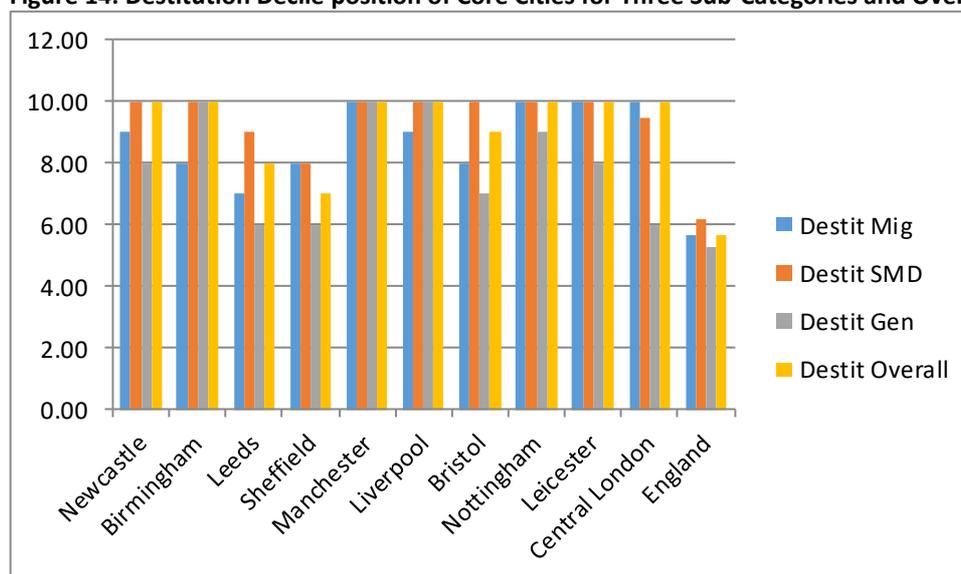
Notes: Destit Mig – migrants; Destit SMD – complex needs; Destit Gen – other UK.

It can be seen that Newcastle is in the top decile for predicted destitution level overall, and also for one of the sub-categories (complex needs). It is in the second group for destitute migrants, and the third group for 'general' (other UK) destitution. Estimated levels of destitution in the top decile are relative common among the core cities, with six other core cities in the top decile for overall destitution alongside Newcastle. Several of the core cities appear to face worse destitution than Newcastle: Manchester is in the top group for all three components; Birmingham and Liverpool are in top groups for complex needs and other UK; and Nottingham and Leicester are in the top groups for destitute migrants and complex needs. Central London is only in the top group for destitute migrants, as well as overall. Bristol is in the top decile for complex needs destitution but in the second decile overall. Leeds and Sheffield are not in the top deciles for any subgroup and have overall destitution levels in the third and fourth deciles.

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[23] Complex needs defined as experiencing two or more of: homelessness (including rough sleeping, using hostels, drop-in centres, soup runs, refuges, etc), drug or alcohol problems, being in trouble with police, begging, or domestic violence.

Key informants and frontline staff were acutely aware of destitution in the city:

> "people are destitute. I think it's important to say that all day, on a daily basis, for prolonged periods of time! Working people as well as people on benefits." (Frontline worker, homelessness prevention and response focus group)

> "People are in massive need. We've got children who are hungry. We've got families who are in work but can't afford to heat or eat in their homes… they can't afford the electricity to go online or they can't afford their phone bill… it's dire. People are destitute in this city and living in significant poverty." (Statutory sector KI)

We have already commented on the relationship between core cities and their surrounding Housing Market Areas in terms of poverty. Figure 15 goes on to show the relative position in terms of destitution deciles.

Figure 15: Overall Destitution Decile position of Core Cities and their surrounding Housing Market Areas, 2017
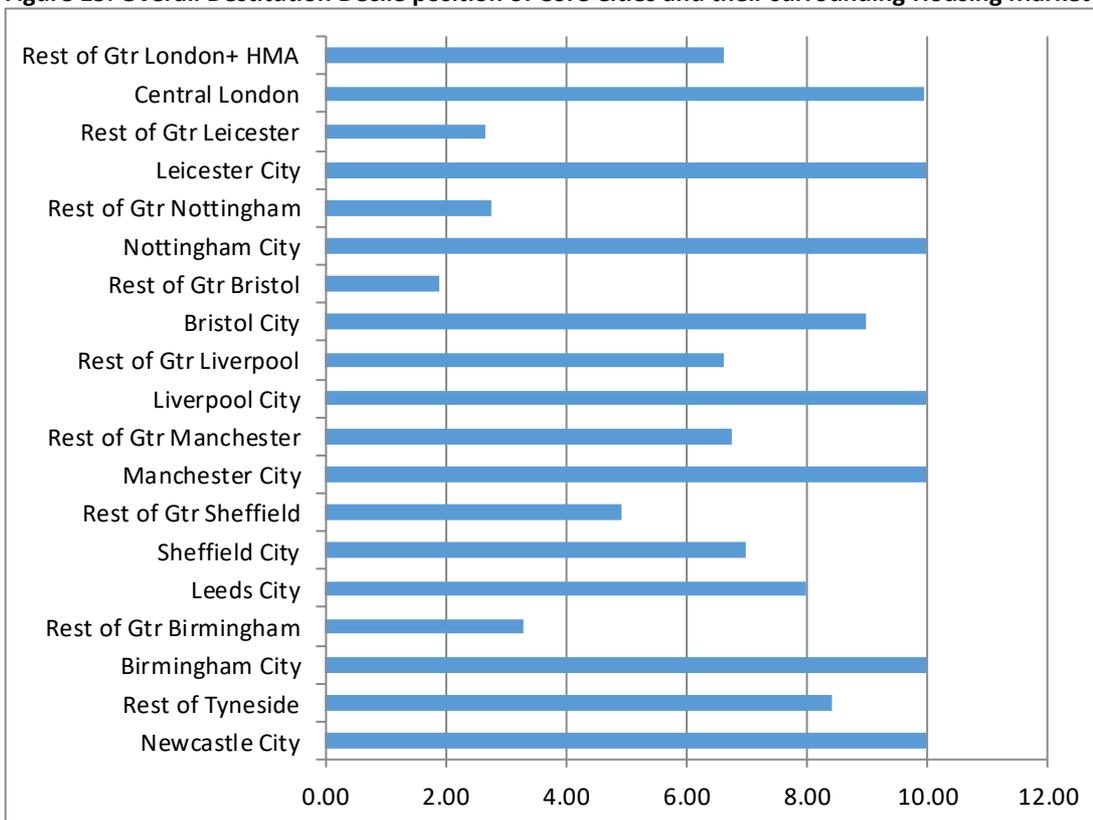
Again, Newcastle stands out as a core city whose hinterland is almost as poor (in this case, destitute) as it is itself. For all the other core cities, the hinterland is markedly less affected by destitution.

Severe and multiple disadvantage

In the preceding section we highlighted that for Newcastle, in common with several other core cities, estimated destitution rates are relatively high and that this particularly reflects high rates of destitution among those with complex needs, or experiencing what is also referred to as Severe and Multiple Disadvantage (SMD). This obviously underlines the strong link with homelessness, as this is one of the key domains of SMD. However, it should be noted that this is primarily single homelessness, which has hitherto been mainly outside the scope of 'priority need' statutory

homelessness, so the estimation of SMD numbers has relied more on other data sources, although some use has been made of numbers recorded as part of the statutory system (for example, non priority homeless). From now on, of course, following the HRA and with the introduction of H-CLIC, there will be much better data on homeless applicants (albeit only those homeless or at risk within 56 days), including on their support needs, as reviewed at national level in chapter five below.

The key sources used for estimating SMD numbers by local authority are the three administrative data sources interrogated in the *Hard Edges* study (Bramley et al, 2015): 'Supporting People' Client data (SP), Offender Assessment System (OASys), and National Drug Treatment Monitoring System (NDTMS) for drug and alcohol treatment. These estimates are effectively centred on 2010/11, although drawing on data for a run of years, and at the current time they cannot readily be updated. Because these administrative data systems and the services they were based in operated on a reasonably comprehensive and consistent basis across the whole country, they provide in principle a good basis for deriving indicators which are valid at local authority and (potentially) smaller geographical areas. Figure 16 shows for each core city the SMD rate estimated overall and the value derived from each of the three datasets (scaled for consistency).

Figure 16: Severe and Multiple Disadvantage Rates Comparing Three Administrative Data Sources by Core City, c.2010-11 (rate per 1000 working age population)
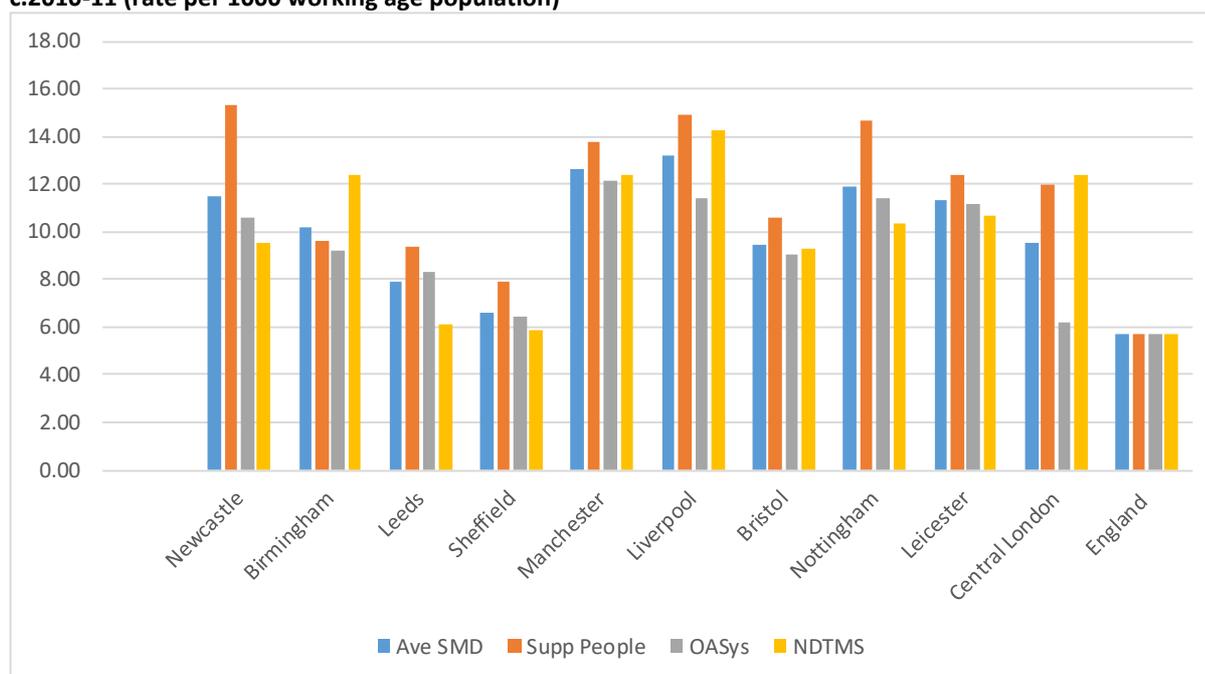
Source: Authors calculations derived the analysis in Hard Edges study (Bramley et al 2015). Note: each series rescaled for consistency with estimated national total number of adults with two or more out of three disadvantages from Homelessness, Offending and Substance Misuse. Values for the Supporting People service in Shire County districts were imputed using a regression model fitted to the data at 'social services area level', with county totals controlled to the known country value.

The patterns in Figure 16 are of great interest, both substantively and methodologically. Substantively, they show that in nearly all cases core cities have much higher rates of SMD than the national average. Methodologically, having three such large administrative data systems to compare is a rare opportunity, and it enables a significant degree of 'triangulation' of evidence about both the scale and profile of SMD, as well as about its geographical incidence.

A particular methodological issue here concerns the possibility that such administratively based indices might be vulnerable to distortion resulting from the possibility that relevant services might be developed unevenly between different parts of the country, for example between cities, suburbs and rural areas. This possibility was considered to be a danger with the Supporting People system, given the way it was developed and how the possibility of greater provision emerging where particular third sector organisations were strongly established and willing to develop services, and/or where particular local authorities were keen to commission such services. The Drug and Alcohol Treatment Services developed under the then National Treatment Agency before moving into Public Health England, and so there is more of a sense of a national service although there still are concerns about uneven availability of treatment. This type of criticism cannot really be levelled at the Offender data, which is essentially driven by offenders committing offences and being committed and then serving sentences in prison or in the community.

With this debate in mind it is particularly interesting to look at the data disaggregated to show the core cities alongside their 'hinterlands', as defined by the Housing Market Areas used in this study. This is the focus of Table 2. It suggests that in some areas there is a fairly consistent pattern, reading horizontally for each area, and comparing the hinterland with the core city. One could probably say that the patterns were fairly consistent for Birmingham, Sheffield, Manchester, Bristol and Leicester. However, for Newcastle and some other cases there appear to be inconsistencies, which may be significant and indicative of particular local circumstances.

In Newcastle, the SP-based figure is much higher than the other two in the city, whereas in the Rest of Tyneside they are much lower. This would be consistent with a story where Supporting People services (primarily geared to single homeless people) were better developed in the city, in comparison to both the hinterland and the wider national picture. We can hypothesise that as a result, more clients went into the city to get these services. The data also suggest that there was a bigger substance-related problem in the Tyneside hinterland than in the core city itself.

Liverpool is a slightly similar case, suggesting relatively well-developed SP services in the core City, but at the same time a relatively high substance problem in the hinterland (although in this case not as high as in the core city). Nottingham is another case where the SP figures for the city look high relative to the numbers from the other two systems.

Statistical modelling analysis derived from this study indicates that higher SMD rates are related to the following factors:

- Younger adults and single person households within the population
- Proportion of the population that is UK-born
- Levels of unemployment, and long term sickness/disability
- Longer term loss of jobs in traditional male industries
- Higher crime incidence
- Presence of mental health, homeless hostels and B&B/holiday accommodation establishments
- Areas with less social housing
- Rural areas

Table 2: Severe and Multiple Disadvantage Rates Comparing three Administrative Data Sources by Core City and Rest of Housing Market Areas, c.2010-11 (rate per 1000 working age population)

Core City and Rest of HMA area	Ave SMD	Supp People	OASys	NDTMS
corecityreg	psmdnew	psmd23dc	pnsmdstk	psmdsubst
Rest of England	5.22	5.18	5.27	5.13
Newcastle City	11.52	15.31	10.61	9.56
Rest of Tyneside	8.87	5.71	8.87	11.80
Birmingham City	10.23	9.63	9.22	12.36
Rest of Gtr Birmingham	3.84	2.78	4.50	3.84
Leeds City	7.95	9.38	8.35	6.14
Sheffield City	6.64	7.89	6.43	5.90
Rest of Gtr Sheffield	5.44	4.11	6.09	5.75
Manchester City	12.61	13.80	12.11	12.41
Rest of Gtr Manchester	6.24	5.18	7.27	5.73
Liverpool City	13.17	14.96	11.43	14.24
Rest of Gtr Liverpool	6.73	5.41	5.70	9.52
Bristol City	9.49	10.56	9.06	9.25
Rest of Gtr Bristol	3.03	2.02	3.07	3.92
Nottingham City	11.91	14.69	11.37	10.33
Rest of Gtr Nottingham	2.97	3.04	3.33	2.40
Leicester City	11.31	12.37	11.17	10.66
Rest of Gtr Leicester	2.75	2.03	3.29	2.64
Central London	9.53	11.97	6.18	12.37
England	5.69	5.69	5.69	5.69

Source and Note: as for Figure 16.

These are based on multiple regression models, so the effects are after allowing for other factors included in the model. While providing some support for the view that the supply of services influences numbers, the stronger story here is about the effects of long-term economic decline and labour market weakness.

Unfortunately, it has not been possible to replicate this study in the period since *Hard Edges* was published, partly due to the progressive collapse of the SP data monitoring system, greater restrictions on access to NDTMS, and other data governance issues. On a more positive note, the development of H-CLIC should, once it beds down after a year or so, provide a valuable new administrative individual record of all people experiencing homelessness who contact their local authority and their support needs, in a situation where – thanks to the HRA – such people will have much more incentive to make that contact and local authorities will be obliged to respond.

While the above analysis has focused on Newcastle's SMD profile derived from national level analyses and in comparison to other core cities, the council's internal administrative data systems provide an opportunity to closer examine the characteristics of the 'complex needs homeless' group within the city. This opportunity was taken up in a 2018 segmentation exercise using data from 'Newcastle

Gateway' spanning the period 2010/11 to 2016/17 undertaken by local authority analysts (NCC, 2018b). The Gateway records information at the individual-level about all clients presenting in need of housing/homelessness support and also records rough sleeping, and thus captures a slightly different and likely broader group than those recorded via the statutory homelessness system and related prevention data (at least prior to the introduction of the HRA). The dataset covers demographic information and self-reported support needs, thus holding a rich combination of information about individuals in these circumstances not available via the statutory homelessness system pre-HRA, although it was recognised that for a variety of reasons the analysis is likely to under-represent the needs of the homeless population, not least because there are high levels of missing data in the data set.

As shown in figure 17, analysts examined self reported (and non-verified) support needs covering offending, mental health needs, and drug and alcohol related support needs to explore severe and multiple disadvantage within this group. They were able to utilise just over 1,600 records over the six year period from which data was analysed (2010/11-2016/17, including information on support needs and found that:

- 18% reported no additional recorded needs beyond homelessness
- 24% reported one additional support need
- 26% reported two additional support needs
- 22% reported three additional support needs
- 10% reported having all four support needs.

Figure 17: SMD profile using Newcastle Gateway Data

Source: NCC, 2018b. Based on analysis of 1,606 people's records which include support needs assessment information. Relevant data held for 69% of the overall population. Missing data excluded from the chart.

Across the entire group, offending and mental health were the most prevalent needs (reported by 78% and 72% respectively), followed by drugs related support needs (53%), and alcohol related support needs (50%). What is most striking (assuming that all those in the sample are homeless), is that more than three quarters of the captured population across the six year time period under examination could be classified as experiencing Severe and Multiple Disadvantage, defined as

experiencing at least two of the five deprivation domains (needing support in relation to homelessness, drug use, alcohol, mental health and offending). The analysis also found that relatively high proportions of individuals recorded on the Gateway reported support needs in relation to their physical health (35%), having a history of experiencing violence (30%), involvement with Children's Social Care (22), having experienced domestic violence (19%) and having a learning disability of difficulty (15%).

This internal analysis combined with the wider national analysis presented above confirm the existence in Newcastle of a significant group of individuals with complex needs facing severe and multiple disadvantages. Population rates of SMD in Newcastle appeared far higher than in England overall, and among the highest in the core cities according the *Hard Edges* analysis (for 2010), behind only Manchester and Liverpool and around the same as in Nottingham. The most likely explanations for this are the socio-economic and historical characteristics of Newcastle (subject to job losses in traditional industries and comparatively high unemployment rates). However, an additional factor may have been the strong development of relevant services in the city combined with the presence of complex needs groups in surrounding areas, and potential migration of these groups into Newcastle to utilise those services. To quote one key informant, *"a problem of severe entrenched complex needs, and people going around the system without those needs being met"* (Third sector KI) was a well recognised problem in the city. Later chapters revisit the implications of this for homelessness prevention, and the possible improvement of prevention activities in the future.

Conclusion

This chapter has set the context for the study's subsequent focus on homelessness prevention by considering how Newcastle compares to the rest of England and in particular other core cities on a range of dimensions. The analysis renders clear the very challenging context in which households are seeking to avoid homelessness and local services seeking to prevent it.

Newcastle can be described as seeking to prevent homelessness in the context of a triple whammy of high local government budget cuts, high welfare reform impacts and the early implementation of Universal Credit. Moreover, in common with other core cities, Newcastle faces a more challenging context than the rest of England in relation to levels of poverty, destitution, and severe and multiple disadvantage. Low pay and working hours seem to be a serious and perhaps worsening problem in Newcastle.

Newcastle's housing market context is much more positive, and indeed potentially enabling of effective preventative interventions, with amongst the lowest private rents of the core cities and social lettings rates double those seen in most of the northern core cities and around three times the English average. There are some doubts, however, about whether this social housing asset is used to its full potential in relation to homelessness prevention, a theme that will be picked up in chapter seven.

In the next chapter, we detail the spectrum of interventions and approaches developed in Newcastle to prevent homelessness, with a view to assessing the effectiveness of those interventions in the rest of the report via statistical data (chapter five), the perspectives of those who have utilised these services (chapter six), and the perspectives of frontline workers and key informants (chapter seven).

4. Newcastle's approach to homelessness prevention

This chapter describes Newcastle's approach to homelessness prevention. The city has pursued a strongly preventative approach to homelessness since the early 2000s (see Fitzpatrick et al, 2011; NCC, 2013 and 2014), initially linked to a Government-led focus on homelessness prevention (see Fitzpatrick et al, 2011). More recently this agenda has been firmly locally driven in the context of 'light touch' government approach to supporting local authorities respond to homelessness (NAO, 2017). The 2014-19 Newcastle homelessness strategy articulated the *"primary challenge"* as being *"to maintain our high levels of homelessness prevention in the face of the largest public sector and welfare cuts in 60 years"* (NCC, 2014, p.22).

The current approach is described in this chapter under three headings: *primary prevention*, targeting those seen to be at risk of homelessness but not imminently; *secondary prevention*, targeting those at more imminent risk of homelessness; and *crisis interventions*, for those who are 'literally' homeless, i.e. do not have any accommodation they can currently occupy. The account draws primarily on the documentary review, key informant interviews and frontline worker focus groups described in chapter two, though in the cases where it is possible, administrative data on prevention activity in Newcastle as compared to other core cities is used.

Primary prevention

A key characteristic of Newcastle's approach to homelessness is a strong emphasis on early or 'upstream' prevention, that is, efforts to support residents who may be at risk of homelessness in the future but are not at imminent risk i.e. within the next two months. Such 'primary prevention' as Newcastle term it requires first, finding households at risk before the point of crisis, and secondly, providing them with meaningful support to remove or lessen that risk. The Council are committed to seeking to prevent homelessness early *"wherever possible"* (NCC, 2019b, p.1) by *"understanding demand and the causes of homelessness and intervening upstream to prevent the threat of homelessness turning into a crisis"* (NCC, 2019b, p.1). Their quarterly homelessness prevention briefing explains the combined rationales for this approach: *"it's the right thing to do for our residents and it's cost effective, it also means making the most of our limited resources"* (NCC, 2019b, p1). Key informants were clear that Newcastle's approach to upstream prevention can legitimately be characterised as *"very proactive"* (Statutory sector KI), even *"very forceful"* (Third sector KI). This section describes the network of approaches that together constitute this proactive approach.

Active Inclusion Newcastle

Central to understanding Newcastle's approach to primary prevention is the establishment in 2013 of 'Active Inclusion Newcastle' (AIN). AIN is a city-wide partnership approach supported by a dedicated service within the local authority. The service seeks to create, facilitate and support partnership arrangements and coordinate work that enables Newcastle residents to live a stable *life*, a guiding acronym that directs attention to people having somewhere to **L**ive, an **I**ncome, **F**inancial inclusion and **E**mployment opportunities.

The AIN approach has its origins in the 2013 budget-setting process, during which the local authority sought to manage substantial budget cuts and the initial impacts, as well as impending threat, of further welfare cuts:

"we had to make cuts and rationalise service areas, so where there may have been more managerial responses to those four pillars of active inclusion [housing, income, financial inclusion, employment], that was brought into one area with less management. The other side was… having to respond to the inter-connected demands of the welfare reforms. Because there is no longer a simple response to… homelessness related to benefits, because the benefit system no longer meets all of the requirements, and left lots of people in Newcastle… without sufficient funding from the benefit system to meet their accommodation costs." (Statutory sector KI)

Key to AIN has been the retention in Newcastle City Council and Your Homes Newcastle of large welfare, money management, and debt advice services to ensure financial inclusion and homelessness prevention. Newcastle's retention of its own housing stock (see chapter three) has been a key facilitator of this investment in advice services, in that rental income has:

"allowed us to retain services for council tenants. We consulted with our council tenants on do they find welfare rights advice a useful thing. So we fund welfare rights advice through our Housing Revenue Account; debt advice, as well. Because council tenants find those things useful." (Statutory section KI)

Also key to AIN however has been that local partners beyond these internal teams have been understood to play a crucial and necessary role if opportunities for effective intervention are to be maximised – as captured in the local mantra that homelessness is *'everyone's business'*[24]. A key focus of AIN is on providing information, training and support to staff and volunteers in relevant organisations who may meet those at risk of homelessness, including those who are not specialists in welfare rights, debt advice, financial inclusion or homelessness prevention. This is pursued via the following activities:

- **Communications and information**: regular updates are provided to a database of staff and volunteers, and relevant information accessible online on the themes of welfare rights, debt and homelessness. Information is also targeted at specific audiences, for instance, local GPs using the web-portal that many of the local GP surgeries use.
- **Trigger point conversation**: two sided information sheets are available to guide non-specialists where they encounter opportunities to talk to residents about benefits, debt and money management, financial inclusion, housing and homelessness prevention, and employment[25];
- **Training, consultancy and advice:** there is a strong emphasis on workforce training and development for non-specialist staff and volunteers, with the aim of moving away from a model of 'signposting' to enabling partner organisations to play an effective role in prevention where possible. This includes e-learning and face to face 'Introduction to Benefits', 'Introduction to Budgeting', 'Introduction to Housing and Homelessness in Newcastle' and 'Preventing Benefit Sanctions' training and various email bulletins;
- **Partnership and governance**: over 100 organisations participate in the Financial Inclusion Group and Homelessness Prevention Forum to create consensus and promote partnership working. Both groups are chaired by the Deputy Leader of the Council underlining the high level political buy-in to the AIN approach;

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[24] See https://www.newcastle.gov.uk/services/housing/housing-advice-and-homelessness/information-professionals-homelessness-prevention
[25] See www.newcastle.gov.uk/services/benefits/welfare-rights-and-money-advice/information-professionals-and-volunteers#trigger

- **Reporting and reviewing**: Newcastle take a data-informed and evidence-rich approach to homelessness prevention. Quarterly reviews are published on the themes of financial inclusion[26] and homelessness prevention[27]. These collate data, demonstrate how limited resources have been used to make a positive difference, and identify opportunities for future improvement. 'Exception reporting' is also used to highlight and learn from missed opportunities/crisis (NCC, 2017). A real time data Dashboard has also been developed to track activity and interventions, and highlight to relevant partners where individuals/households are falling through the gaps left by existing services (NCC, 2018c). These ongoing and regular reporting and review processes are supplemented by a plethora of additional resources, including commissioned reviews of work in this area[28] and bespoke ad hoc internal analyses on specific themes (e.g. NCC, 2018b).

Efforts to secure Newcastle residents the foundations of a stable life (across the domains of housing, and income, financial inclusion and employment) include a raft of activities reported in detail in these quarterly briefings, including:

- **The Newcastle Advice Compact**: a range of voluntary and public sector organisations in Newcastle provide face-to-face advice on welfare, money and debt matters. The Compact brings these organisations together monthly to co-ordinate the provision of that advice and promote consistent communications and standards. During 2017/18, the Advice Compact secured £30 million in benefit gains for the 19,000 clients that were advised (NCC, 2018c) and secured over £2.5 million in written off debts (NCC, 2018e);
- **Targeted outreach** to maximise benefit take up among target groups, for instance, older people's take-up of Pension Credit, carers' take-up of appropriate benefits, black and minority ethic residents take-up of Tax Credits, and appropriate take-up of relevant benefits for families including children with disabilities;
- **Digital inclusion initiatives:** during 2017/18, over 500 people attended digital skills courses and 129 received one to one digital support, provided by a combination of professionals and volunteers; free wi-fi was available in 69 public buildings and city centre streets; twice monthly workshops were provided to support residents use their tablet or smartphone; libraries delivered one-to-one digital support to clients needing it to access UC; and specialist training was provided to staff in community/charitable organisations;
- **Employment support:** provided by a range of partners, including free workshops and events at community venues; opportunities to meet with employers with vacancies and training opportunities; and supported employment opportunities for vulnerable individuals. During 2017/18 NCC recorded supporting almost 1000 individuals into employment, volunteering or apprenticeships via these routes (NCC, 2019b);
- **Access to affordable credit** as an alternative to high interest/damaging alternatives via Loan Shark Awareness training to organisations and volunteers, promotion of credit union membership and loads in partnership with advice services and community organisations;
- **Fuel poverty reduction:** including provision of specialist energy saving and fuel debt advice and casework; Crisis Support Scheme provision of fuel vouchers (also see below); emergency payments to energy suppliers for households experiencing hardship due to benefit delays; a

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[26] See www.newcastle.gov.uk/services/benefits/welfare-rights-and-money-advice/information-professionals-and-volunteers-0

[27] See www.newcastle.gov.uk/services/housing/housing-advice-and-homelessness/information-professionals/newcastle-homelessness

[28] See 'Our evidence base' at www.newcastle.gov.uk/services/housing/housing-advice-and-homelessness/information-professionals-homelessness-prevention

council run price comparison/switching scheme; and programme to install efficient heating systems for fuel poor households funded by National Grid;

- **Local Welfare Assistance:** comprising (1) the Supporting Independence Scheme (formerly the Community Care Grant element of the Social Fund) which helps people on low incomes resettle following homelessness or an institutional stay and/or avoid (re)entering an institution by contributing to the costs of basic household items (beds, white goods etc.). In 2017/18, 670 households received a total of just under £550,000 through the scheme, representing an overspend of over 10% relative to budget. Nevertheless, the 2018/19 budget has been cut by 5% as part of the council's efforts to operate on radically reduced budgets from Central Government (NCC, 2018h); and (2) the Crisis Support Scheme which covers the costs of food, clothing, fuel, heating and/or emergency travel costs to cover short-term crises and assisted 1.487 households in 2017/18 (NCC, 2018a).
- **Discretionary Housing Payments** (see below).

A single online client recording system – Newcastle Gateway – is managed by the Active Inclusion Unit within the local authority, in partnership with other support agencies, and provides an access point for referrals to all relevant supports which can be utilised directly by partner agencies spanning the Housing Advice Centre, Adult and Children's Social Care, mental health support, substance misuse services, offender management services, health workers and voluntary sector partners. The Gateway is also used to record rough sleeping (see below), in line with the CHAIN methodology used by the Greater London Authority. In 2017/18, almost 20,000 individuals were matched with 76 different services by over 500 staff users of the Gateway (NCC, 2019a).

Homelessness prevention trailblazer
In 2016, Newcastle City Council agreed to be one of the 'early adopters' under the Homelessness Prevention Trailblazer programme launched by the (then) Department for Communities and Local Government. The funding stream sought to promote and support innovative practice in homelessness, with prevention at its core, and Newcastle received over £900,000 to be used for such purposes between January 2017 and March 2019.

Newcastle deployed this funding to further build on the AIN 'system change' approach, using some of the resources to support continuing workforce development for relevant staff and volunteers; support and further develop existing governance frameworks; strengthen the analysis and reporting of prevention activities used to drive improvements; and move towards outcomes focused commissioning (NCC, 2016). Trailblazer resources were also used to pilot two new ways of working to identify and support those at risk of homelessness early with relevant partners: first, the multidisciplinary team (MDT) and second, the Homelessness Prevention Pilot with Jobcentre Plus.

- *Multidisciplinary Team*
Appointed in Autumn 2017, the MDT comprises of specialist caseworkers from the city's ALMO Your Homes Newcastle, the local authority's in house welfare rights and debt advice teams, and the Jobcentre. The team aim to provide integrated casework for individuals at risk of homelessness where existing services do not provide the intensity of support required, and takes a proactive 'case finding', rather than referrals driven, approach. Households at risk have been identified via seven routes:

- Private renters identified as at risk of financial crisis using predictive analytics based on data sources including Council Tax and Discretionary Housing Payment records;
- YHN tenants affected by the 'bedroom tax'
- YHN tenants affected by the benefit cap
- Single YHN tenants in the 'Sustaining Tenancies' process (linked to rent arrears)
- Households identified via Energy Services
- Larger families living in private tenancies who may soon transition onto Universal Credit if they experience a change in circumstances identified using predictive analytics
- YHN tenants experiencing relative poverty and rent arrears identified using predictive analytics

Regular progress and learning reports have captured the achievements and challenges of the team (NCC, 2018 and see chapter 7), and the final report detailing learning throughout the pilot period will be available in June 2019. Key informant describing the MDT as *"truly a pilot"* (Statutory Sector KI) and involving a process of continuous learning. According to a key informant, at April 2019, the team had approached a total of 300 residents via these routes, and report making contact with around half of those approached (NCC, 2018f). Of those contacted, the team are finding high levels and complexity of needs despite the focus on finding households 'early'. The vast majority have additional needs beyond the skills of the core team, including mental health issues, being victims of harassment or abuse (including domestic abuse), and children's services involvement (NCC, 2019). The team report taking immediate action to mitigate the residents' situation by increasing income or decreasing outgoings, but needing significant time to work with targeted households to resolve their situation longer term (NCC, 2018 and 2019).

Fieldwork for this study was conducted during the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) funded period of the Trailblazer and MDT but that funding came to an end in March 2019. The MDT team have, however, secured funding to continue to their work for another 18 months through Newcastle City Council's 'Life Chances' Fund. Key informants explained that this locally-funded extension would enable the city to *"figure out which bits of learning can be drawn out to a wider service"* (Statutory sector KI). On this point see chapter seven.

- *Jobcentre referrals pilot*

Linked to this Trailblazer programme, and a Ministerial Working Group pilot aiming to prevent homelessness risk related to benefit administration and unemployment, from June 2017 Newcastle has trained over 134 Jobcentre Work Coaches to be able to identify early signs of homelessness risk and deploy 'easements' reducing work related conditionality until people's housing situation stabilises. Active referral pathways have also been developed for those who need it with relevant partners (the Housing Advice Centre itself, Crisis for single homeless households, and YHN for their tenants), with over 200 referrals made to both Crisis and the HAC between June 2017 and September 2018 (NCC, 2019b). Here this statutory sector key informant explains how this active referral approach differs from more passive previous approaches to signposting:

> "before... [the Trailblazer] we would be more of a signpost than a referrer... [previously] we might say to somebody who came in and said that they'd had a Notice of Seeking Possession or they were being made homeless... 'Go along to [the Housing Advice Centre]'... That would be the end of that conversation. So what that developed into is more of a robust referral pathway so we make a formal referral into the Housing Advice Centre and then we get feedback... we get a person's consent to share information... and then... we know if they've been. We know what

interventions might have been put in place to try and stabilise their housing or find them some housing or find them different housing. So we can then take it the next step… now we've got a much more robust referral and feedback mechanism" (Statutory sector KI)

Lower numbers of referrals are needed to the city's major social landlord YHN as support staff from the organisation are co-located in Jobcentre officers on a full-time basis. This co-location was instigated as part of preparations for the roll-out of Universal Credit to provide advice in situ to prevent homelessness risk escalating among YHN tenants. This way of working has now been championed at by Central Government, with the Rough Sleeping Strategy sharing it as an example of best practice and innovative partnership work (MHCLG, 2018a). It also received positive endorsement in the Trailblazer Evaluation (ICF, 2018).

Outwith the formal trailblazer partnership work, Jobcentre staff also provide advice within external organisations about benefit access, administration and work-related conditionality. Developing a relationship with a young person's supported accommodation unit was reported to have been extremely valuable in dispelling 'myths' around Universal Credit and access to benefits – and in promoting (re)engagement among young people, who are at much higher risk of being sanctioned than older age groups (Watts et al, 2014; Webster, 2018). It was recognised however that Jobcentre staff did not have capacity to engage in any such outreach systematically, but rather did so where there was a clear local need and opportunity (e.g. because a particular organisation was located near to a Jobcentre).

Reflecting on the Trailblazer work as a whole, this statutory sector key informant explains why it has, in their view been particularly valuable:

"[it's] a really positive initiative… we were heartened because government recognised the financial and moral case for supporting and sustaining people to keep their home, rather than a crisis-based response. So that was positive. It provided infrastructure to help us develop our approach further and to test some new ways of working, like [the] multidisciplinary team. It led to the pilot with the Jobcentre that has… integrated their provision with our provision, which seems not something to be celebrated; it should just be a common sense response… but it is heralded as kind of a breakthrough" (Statutory sector KI)

This social housing sector key informant concurred, emphasising that Trailblazer funding and projects had enabled YHN to work with some of their "most at risk tenants" and spend *"a lot of time… looking into some of the issues that tenants have got in a lot of detail – more detail than we can do on a daily basis"* (Social housing sector KI).

Sustaining tenancies and preventing evictions
A major and long-term component of Newcastle's early prevention work has involved efforts to support YHN tenants to maintain their social sector accommodation and minimise social sector evictions. YHN's advice and support services now include those focused on preventing eviction due to rent arrears, pathways for tenants engaged with mental health services, hospital and drug/alcohol rehabilitation, and support for refugees and asylum seekers given leave to remain. Once funded via Supporting People, these services are now substantially funded via core rents. The nature of the support provided includes housing-related support to maintain accommodation, help to resolve benefit problems, debt advice, and negotiation/mediation with friends/family where conflict risks leading to homelessness.

Key informants described the social landlord's approach as proactive, and focused on early intervention with the aim that *"it doesn't reach a stage where they are facing eviction and possibly homelessness"* (Social housing sector KI), and in cases where it does, the landlord can be confident that it was *"a clean eviction"* (Social housing sector KI) i.e. that they'd *"done absolutely everything"* they could to prevent it:

> "The thing that shows them up as needing assistance is quite often the rent account really. We get a lot of referrals [for supportive interventions] from [the] income [team] really for people that are getting into financial distress. That can be… quite low-level. Somebody could have gone into the housing office and said, 'I've lost my job', and it's just a change of circumstances" (Social housing sector KI)

> "[there's] a real understanding that eviction should always be the last resort, and I think, generally, that's how accounts are managed from £50 of arrears up. So I think from our perspective… we do a lot in terms of the preventative work" (Social housing sector KI)

There was also an emphasis on partnership working in pursuit of these tenancy sustainment/eviction prevention aims, something acknowledged to be easier as YHN is an ALMO and thus able to take *"a whole-council view to what the implications are of evicting someone"* (Social housing sector KI):

> "If they [a tenant] hit a certain trigger then we send the details to City Council and say, 'Look, this person isn't paying their rent. We've tried X, Y and Z' and then… they have a look at it and we identify if there's any vulnerabilities… children in the household… any mental health [issues] that we're aware of, any other support agencies. We give all that to the city council, who then they look at what their provision is… and see if they can support the tenant as well." (Social housing sector KI)

Key informants explained that such efforts were initially catalysed by the 2002 Homelessness Act's requirement that local authorities develop homelessness strategies with a view to improving prevention, and then concretised by the introduction in 2007 of the local Prevention from Eviction Protocol (latterly renamed Sustaining Tenancies Guidance). Post-2010 welfare reforms had prompted key partners to revisit the guidance and adopt an even more proactive, interventionist and prevention-focused model:

> "YHN were really ahead of the game with welfare reform. We put a lot of preparations in place from 2011 onwards and continue to do so… We've taken a really proactive approach… we were… not just going to wait for this to happen and let it wash over us. We're going to be really proactive in telling our tenants about it… preparing them properly for it" (Social housing sector KI)

> "there's been a bit of extra emphasis…. particularly with welfare reform, to get our frontline income recovery officers who might previously have been checking up on a housing benefit claim, making a rent arrears payment arrangement, now needing to be far more knowledgeable on specifically Universal Credit, but also focusing their efforts towards sustaining a tenancy rather than simply pursuing a debt." (Social housing sector KI)

The introduction of the benefit cap and bedroom tax were particularly highlighted as necessitating proactive approaches:

> "the introduction of the bedroom tax changed the way that we looked at sustaining tenancies because… it just put so many people at risk." (Social housing sector KI)

> "when [the] benefit cap came through, we had two dedicated officers that were working with those families for quite a significant period. That's over 300 families that we had come through on [the] benefit cap and we worked really hard to make sure that they still had tenancies because we knew, if… families… were… getting evicted from us, the repercussions for the council were massive. There were multiple kids that… would have probably ended up in care situations there and we just didn't want that to happen." (Social housing sector KI)

As a result of these approaches YHN has seen evictions reduce from 197 in 2007/08 (NCC, 2013) to 61 in 2017/18 (NCC, 2019b). With the numbers directly threatened with eviction so low, the city council are able to examine every individual case to review causes and possible opportunities for improving eviction prevention protocols (NCC, 2019a). What was also clear, however, is that this proactive focus on sustaining tenancies and minimising evictions has consequences for those on low incomes seeking to *access* the tenure, with barriers in place for those not passing 'affordability checks' (see chapter seven).

In addition to the work detailed in this section so far undertaken by and with YHN, Newcastle City Council are also building partnerships with some of the city's other social landlords replicating some of these protocols and ways of working (NCC, 2019b). Upstream prevention activity is also undertaken by a Preventative Outreach Team based in the city's temporary accommodation facility Cherry Tree View. This team work with households following move on from TA, and with households struggling to maintain existing tenancies following referral from YHN (e.g. when the household has not engaged with in-house YHN support) or the Housing Advice Centre. In total in 2017/18, the team worked with 133 new households, and were working with 121 by the end of quarter 2 2018/19 indicating a clear recent rise in demand for the service (NCC, 2019b). During 2017/18, successful outcomes were achieved with over three quarters of households, with most of the remaining quarter not engaging with the service. Workers who took part in focus groups as part of this study emphasised that while the intention was to prevent homelessness 'upstream', the support they offered households had shifted to a more 'crisis focus' since 2010, with greater use of, for example, food bank referrals and fuel vouchers. It was emphasised, however, that these kind of crisis supports could be a means of engaging households in more sustainable forms of support and advice.

As is the case in many local authorities (Park, 2019 forthcoming), in the context of the welfare cuts described in previous chapters, Discretionary Housing Payments (DHPs) have become *"a really important tool"* (Social housing sector KI) in homelessness prevention in Newcastle. During 2017/18, NCC spent 100% of the allocated DHP budget of £1.17 million – up tenfold on the budget of just under £100k available in 2011/12 (NCC, 2018) – primarily helping residents impacted by the bedroom tax or the benefit cap[29]. In line with the city's partnership approach to homelessness prevention, DHP processes were aligned with advice and support provision meaning that the local authority and/or relevant social housing providers (YHN and Karbon Homes) are notified when a DHP is awarded or

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[29] DWP 2018 Data tables: Use of Discretionary Housing Payments, analysis of end of year returns from local authorities: April 2017 to March 2018

refused[30]. This can then be used to target households for support, including intensive support through the multidisciplinary team (NCC, 2018f). This approach was also seen to be useful in creating the relationships and lines of communication needed to deploy DHP as a tool to promote engagement and compliance with the conditions attached to awards (to seek work and/or engage with support services), thereby addressing the issue that "*a big caseload of people… are, essentially, dependant on the DHP*" (Social housing sector KI and see chapter seven). It was also clear that YHN are making use of Alternative Payment Arrangements (APA) as an early prevention tool where they have concerns about tenants paying their rent when receiving Universal Credit (also see chapter seven).

Secondary prevention

This section considers the work undertaken in Newcastle to prevent homelessness among those at more imminent risk. It proceeds in four sections: first, an analysis of recorded prevention activity during 2017/18 (prior to the introduction of the HRA) in Newcastle as compared to other core cities; second, a consideration of prevention activity in Newcastle since April 2018 since the HRA came into force; third, an account of actions taken to prevent eviction from supported accommodation provision in the city; and finally a summary of activities undertaken to prevent homelessness among those leaving institutions (e.g. hospitals, custody).

Prevention and relief activity in 2017/18 compared to other core cities

Up until April 2018, local authorities were required to submit statistical returns detailing their homelessness prevention and relief activities[31]. Since April 2018, this has been superseded by H-CLIC introduced with the HRA. With this new system in operation for less than a year at the time of writing, previous prevention and relief statistics give us a means of comparing activity across local authorities – and core cities – in the most recent full year 2017/18. Given that before April 2018, prevention and relief activities were discretionary, we see very different practice between local authorities, likely reflecting a combination of local policy, demand and resources (MHCLG, 2018b).

To start to get a sense of the relative scale and type of prevention and relief activity in Newcastle and the core cities over time, figure 18 compares the rate of prevention and relief cases (per 1000 households) in 2009 and 2018. The clear message is that Newcastle has been a consistent high performer in terms of the volume of recorded prevention and relief activity undertaken. In 2009, only Nottingham recoded more cases, with Newcastle the firm leader of the pack in 2018 with almost 40 cases per 1000 households. The nearest cities in terms of volume of activity are Leeds and Leicester, both recording fewer than 30 cases per 1000. Newcastle is also unusual in that the majority intervention has consistently been on enabling households to remain in their own accommodation, with the rate of such activity far higher at both time points than in any other core city. The vast majority of cities rely more on helping households access alternative accommodation. What we also see here is a shift away from relief activities (i.e. securing accommodation for those already homeless) in Newcastle over the nine year period under scrutiny. Having played a substantial role in 2009, such activity plays almost no role 2018, with securing alternative accommodation for those at risk but not yet homeless much more prominent. Overall, the data suggests that Newcastle City Council were far more successful than any other core city in 2018 in preventing households become homeless, and this may mean they have less need to engage in 'relief' activities.

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[30] At the time of writing, arrangements for notifying relevant local authority advice and support services were on hold pending a review of information sharing arrangements with Revenues and Benefits (see chapter seven).
[31] See https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/homelessness-statistics

Figure 18: Prevention and Relief Cases per 1000 Households, Newcastle and Core Cities, 2009 and 2018
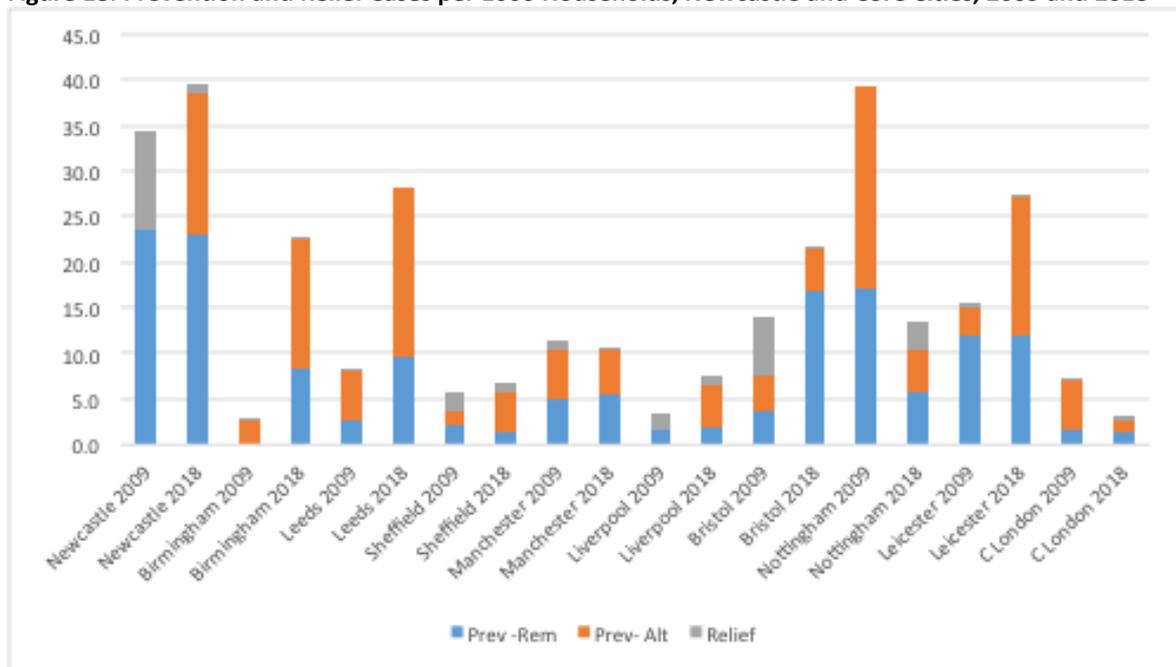
Notes: Prev-Rem and Prev-Alt refer to prevention activities enabling the household to remain in their existing accommodation or obtain alternative accommodation for the next 6 months. Relief refers to actions securing accommodation for households who have already become homeless.

Figure 19 focuses in on the mix of specific kinds of prevention activity focused on keeping people in their current accommodation across the core cities during 2017/18. There are quite big differences, and it is clear that the big emphasis in Newcastle is on financial and debt interventions, including resolving arrears, Housing Benefit problems, and debt advice. There is relatively little emphasis on sanctuary schemes for domestic violence (common in Sheffield and Leeds) or the Homeless Prevention Fund, which is uniquely important in Bristol (where it is used to provide deposits and rent in advance loans to enable access to the PRS accommodation, see Bristol City Council, 2013). There is very little emphasis on legal/negotiation assistance with private landlords in Newcastle, as opposed to Sheffield, Manchester and Central London where it is very prominent. Change since 2009 shows that Newcastle has increased its focus on resolving arrears, housing benefit problems and debt advice, in line with the well-documented impacts of welfare cuts/reforms and the introduction of Universal Credit.

Figure 19: Prevention activity mix relating to remaining in current accommodation in Core Cities & England, 2017-18.
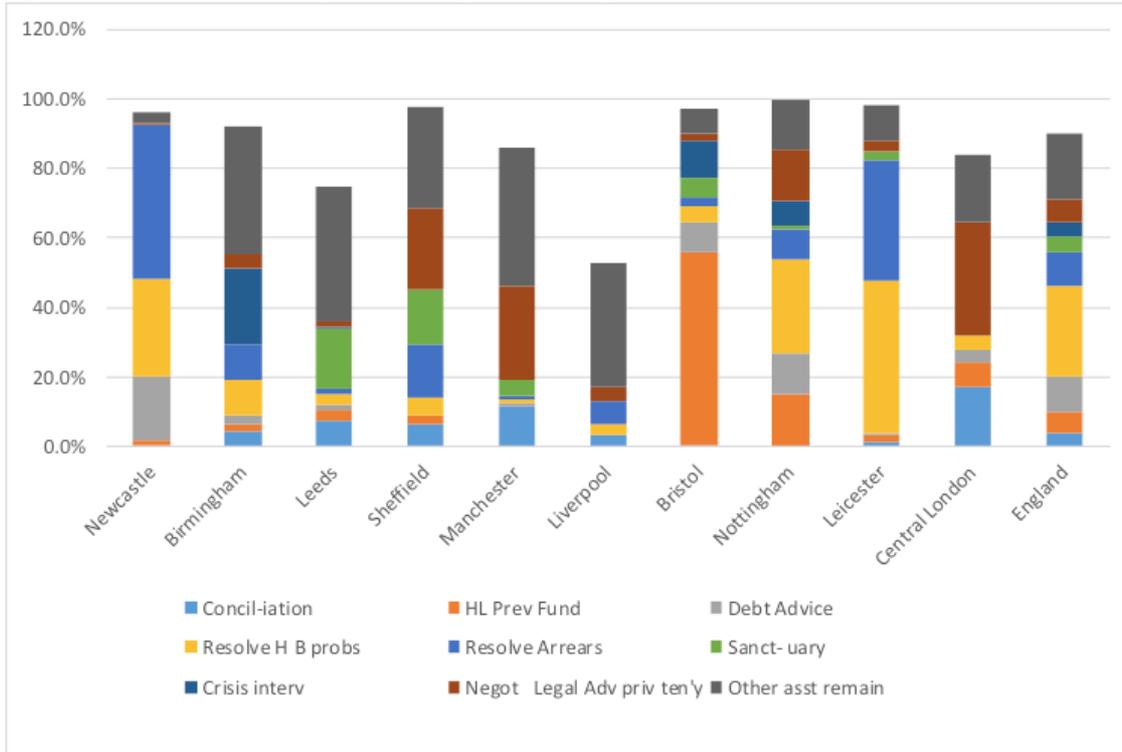
Note: bars do not sum to 100% for several reasons reflecting the nature of the underlying data, including the types of prevention deployed are not covered by the categories used here and/or that prevention/relief activity is not recorded at this level of detail.

Figure 20 Combined prevention and relief activity focused on alternative accommodation by Core Cities & England, 2017-18
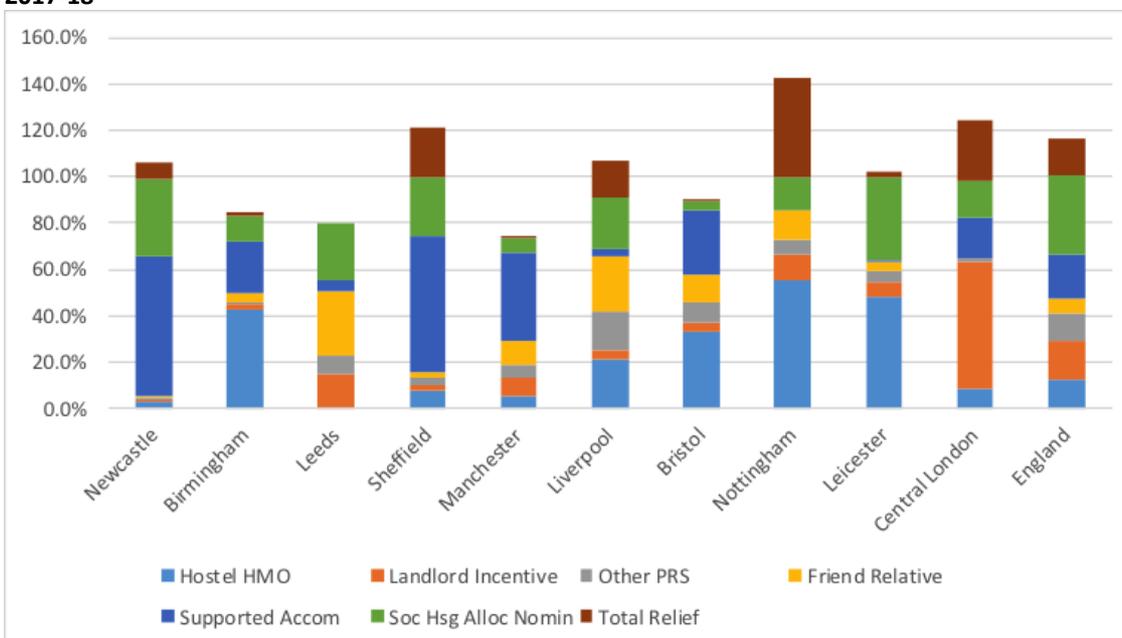
Note: bars do not sum to 100% for several reasons reflecting the nature of the underlying data. First, it appears that in some cities (Birmingham, Leeds, Manchester) the types of prevention deployed are not covered by the categories used here and/or that prevention/relief activity is not recorded at this level of detail. Second, in some authorities individual households are subject to multiple prevention/relief activities (Newcastle, Sheffield, Nottingham).

Prevention activity focused on alternative accommodation (shown in figure 20) seems to focus mainly, in Newcastle, on supported accommodation and social housing allocations/nominations. These are important in some other cores cities (e.g. Sheffield), and indeed significant use of social housing allocations is widespread, and common across England as a whole. Newcastle puts less emphasis on relief overall than some other cities (again, perhaps indicating that its prevention strategy is more successful), and makes little use of landlord incentives, other PRS or friends/relatives. Landlord incentives and other PRS are quite widely used across England, and notably in London, but less so in the other core cities. Securing accommodation with friends and relatives feature quite strongly in Leeds and Liverpool. Perhaps more controversial may be the heavy use of hostels/Houses of Multiple Occupation (HMOs) in Birmingham, Bristol, Nottingham and Leicester.

Over time, Newcastle has increased its use of supported and social housing allocations, with less reliance on hostels or the PRS. Again, this may reflect the implementation of a conscious preventative strategy, but probably also reflects a more favourable supply situation for mainstream social and supported housing. The trend away from hostels and towards supported accommodation use should be interpreted in light of the diversity of provision in both categories and the 'blurry' distinction between them[32].

Parallel work modelling homeless numbers in the context of the Crisis Homeless Projections research has asked the question: What policy measures could reduce levels of homelessness? Scenarios modelled include the cessation/reversal of welfare cuts, boosted new housing supply, regional convergence in economic growth and – of particular relevance here – 'maximal prevention' i.e. that all local authorities match the practices currently implemented by those with the most extensive homelessness prevention activity. Each of these factors is projected to lead to reductions in homelessness with maximal prevention activity having among the most significant positive impacts on future homelessness trends. For the key indicators used to measure homelessness prevention, Newcastle tended to be ranked high among the core cities on these indicators, particularly early on (in 2009), underlining the picture of it being an early adopter of prevention.

Homelessness prevention in Newcastle under the HRA
With the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act in April 2018, local authorities' legal duties to homeless households have changed substantially, with homelessness prevention and relief now a statutory duty, rather than non-statutory discretionary provision. Although the legal definitions of homelessness and priority need and the 'Main Rehousing Duty' owed to priority need households do not change, the introduction of comprehensive statutory prevention and relief duties to all households applying for and found to be homeless or at risk within 56 days are a complete game-changer in terms of the number and profile of people going through the system (LGA, 2019; Fitzpatrick et al, 2019).

A new individual-based data recording system (H-CLIC) is in place to measure activity under the HRA, although this is still 'bedding down'. This new system is a game game-changer too, in terms of how we can interpret and compare statistics. In particular, it is worth noting that with the exception of the temporary accommodation counts, most of the other key numbers from the system will not be comparable with the pre-April 2018 statistics, certainly not as measures of external demand or

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[32] See https://www.mrassociates.org/knowledge-base/specified-accommodation/specified-accommodation-57cd7b0437754/what-is-supported-accommodation, Homeless Link (2018) and Mackie et al (2017).

problems, although they will paint a picture of Local Authority activity under the HRA in more detail than has previously been available. However, to date, only one initial and partial set of data has been released, referring to one quarter (April-June 2018) and with very limited data available as yet at the local authority level.

Early LA level data is available on the overall number of applicants during the first quarter of the HRA's operation and this demonstrates the very different flow of households through the new system. In the financial year (FY) 2017/18, Newcastle made 864 decisions, had 506 new homeless applications, and had 217 priority need acceptances. In the first quarter of FY 2018/19 under the HRA, Newcastle found 551 applicants homeless or at risk within 56 days, implying a much higher annual caseload of 2,204. The assumption that the annual caseload will be four times the number reported in the first quarter of 2018/19 may not be correct, given the transition to a substantially new system. If previous non-statutory prevention and relief are included in the comparison as additional numbers, the comparison suggests a *reduction* of homelessness cases in Newcastle (from 4,160), but here there is a strong risk of double counting[33]. Homelessness prevention officers are reporting a *qualitative* shift in the nature of casework, highlighting that the time it takes to work with clients under the HRA is higher than previously (NCC, 2019b). This is likely due to the onerousness of case management and recording practices and/or a shift in client profile under the HRA.

The expected pattern of higher caseloads under HRA is found in some other core cities, but to varying degrees. For example, there appears to be an increase in Birmingham, Leeds, Sheffield and Liverpool, but at the same time there are apparent reductions in Manchester, Bristol, Nottingham and central London. Caution is needed in interpreting these early data from the new system, partly for reasons mentioned in the above paragraph. In addition, possible explanations for differences may lie in differing emphases on upstream prevention activity in some cities (including Newcastle) and/or the possibility that some cities were anticipating the new duties soon to apply under the HRA and changed practice earlier than legally required.

We also see variation in the annualised rate of homeless decisions relative to the household population of each city, as shown by the overall height of the bars in Figure 21. Rates in Newcastle appear relatively high, second only to Nottingham among the comparator cities and consistent with a continuation of the high level of activity in Newcastle shown in the previous section prior to the HRA.

There is also variation between the core cities in the balance of this new caseload between households owed the initial prevention duty (not yet homeless but threatened within 56 days) and those owed the relief duty (actually homeless), as well as the additional number of non-homeless/not at risk recorded (see figure 21). The proportion of the caseload assessed as not homeless or at risk ranged from 0% in Leicester to 34% in Bristol, with Newcastle close to average at 8.6%. The proportion of cases already homeless and owed the relief duty was somewhat above average in Newcastle (55% vs 40%), but below the level observed in Manchester (69%) or in Sheffield (62%). This is at first sight surprising given the low emphasis on relief within the 2017/18 pre-HRA stats and explanations for this are considered further below. In contrast to the pattern seen in Newcastle, Manchester and Sheffield, Leeds and Nottingham have a predominance (65-70%) of at-risk prevention cases.

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[33] The supposition would assume that there is no double-counting of the same cases as between acceptances, two types of prevention and the relief categories in the pre-2018 statistics and this may not be tenable, in particular local authorities or generally.

Figure 21 Initial Decisions Under Post-HRA Homelessness Regime by Core City in 2018 Q2 (annualised percent of households)
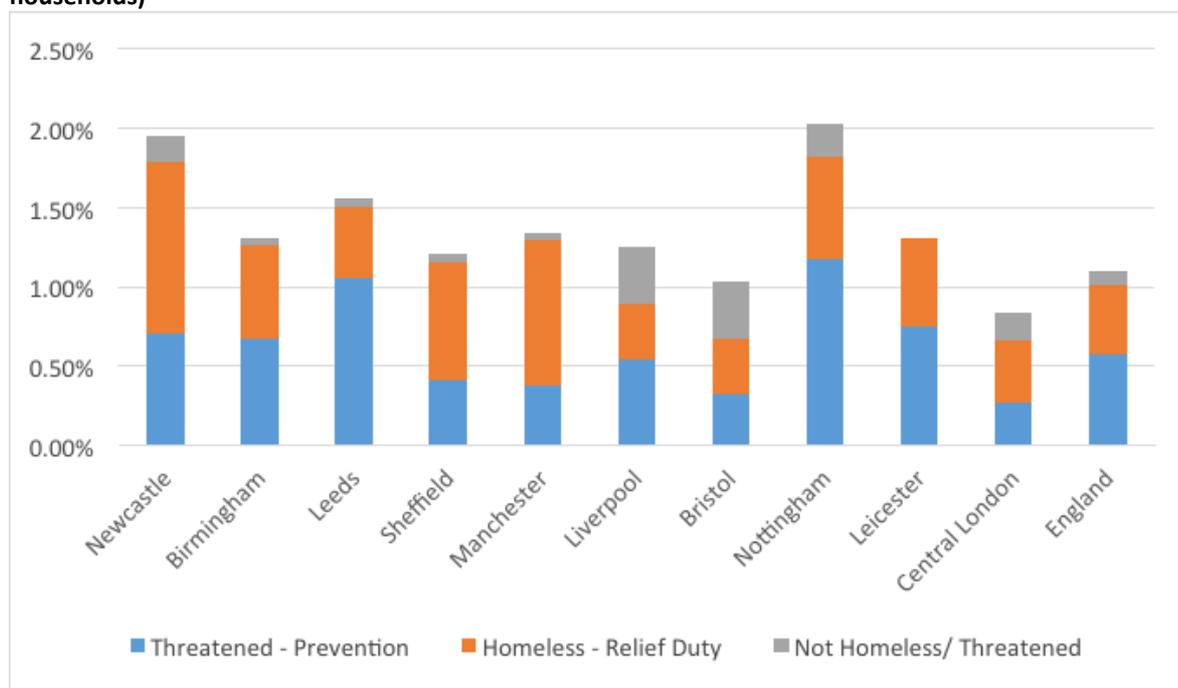
Source: MHCLG Statutory homelessness decisions on initial duties owed, April to June 2018, England, Table A1; denominator authors' estimate household number per local authority 2018.

Locally reported data illuminate the focus of prevention and relief activity beyond these headline figures in Newcastle. The most common prevention activities are: the provision of advice and information; that accommodation is secured for the applicant; provision of mediation with friends and family; mediation/negotiation or advocacy to prevent eviction; and supported housing (NCC, 2019b). The five most common outcomes of this prevention activity are that alternative accommodation is secured for 12 months, contact with the applicant lost, the prevention duty failed (with households then becoming 'relief duty' cases), alternative accommodation secured for 6 months or more, and finally, existing accommodation secured.

It is not clear the extent to which this high level of 'lost contact' outcomes is problematic. It could represent that households' have resolved their own housing situation or the factors putting them at risk of homelessness abated. Alternatively, it could reflect a problem with the offer or service provided the Housing Advice Centre. In response, the Council has committed to exploring how engagement with those presenting can be enhanced (NCC, 2019b).

In relation to relief activity, the majority of households approaching the council as 'already homeless' in the first two quarters of 18/19 did so because family were no longer willing or able to accommodate them, with (non-violent) relationships ending another primary reason (NCC, 2019b). The ending of private rental tenancies was also an important driver, so too eviction from supported housing, a trigger that – in principle at least – may frequently be foreseeable and potentially avoidable, pointing to a possible area for improved prevention activity. This is discussed further in the next section.

Locally reported data also shows an increase in admits into emergency beds over the first two quarters of 2018/19 compared to 2017/18, a trend that is explained as reflecting the local authority's expanded prevention duties under the HRA (NCC, 2019b).

A key theme among key informants involved in this study was that these statistics collected under the HRA do not reflect the full spectrum of prevention activity underway in the city. This may help explain why, perhaps contrary to expectation and the distribution of activity in 2017/18, Newcastle shows rather more emphasis on relief activity than prevention in Figure 21. Key informants emphasised that the prevention activity recorded by these statistics is limited to that occurring up to 56 days prior, whereas Newcastle has historically placed a very strong emphasis on prevention work occurring further upstream:

> "The difficulty we've got is our prevention figure that we report nationally to MHCLG might be considerably lower than what we're actually doing… The previous measure of prevention helped us to describe what we were doing to try and keep people in their homes and to avoid them coming into the homelessness system. Now we're going to need to have an additional measure that shows the value of those services, I think, because it's not going to necessarily be featured as part of our national [statistical return under the HRA]" (Statutory sector KI)

This contributor went on to explain the kinds of prevention activity not now captured by these HRA statistics but routine in Newcastle, giving a recent example of a private tenant in substantial arrears, but with a landlord who is understanding of their problems and thus showing forbearance. No 'Section 21' Notice had been served and the tenant was not at risk of homelessness within the next two months. Here, local services were providing welfare rights advice about Universal Credit entitlement and debt advice to help them manage the arrears. *"That's the difference…"* the key informant explained: *"we're trying to work quite a long way upstream. We know that if we don't do that, [that person] is going to come through the 56 day route, but what's the point in waiting for that?"*.

Other participants echoed these sentiments about the new legislative framework. *"The spirit of the Homelessness Reduction Act"* was acknowledged to be extremely positive in its endorsement of *"a more holistic approach"* (Statutory sector KI) and recognition (via the Duty to Refer) that other local actors have a key role to play in homelessness prevention. However, the view from Newcastle, was that in practice the Act had not led (and would not lead) to major improvements in homelessness prevention because it sought to pull local authorities doing much less than Newcastle on prevention up to a standard still well below Newcastle's practice:

> "we were doing everything before that [the HRA] in terms of identifying people, in terms of getting them to the help that they needed… the duty to refer its homeless or at-risk within 56 days… whereas what we've said with the Trailblazer is don't worry about a timescale on when someone might be evicted, it's the fact that you're identifying that somebody is having difficulty paying their rent or is in a vulnerable situation who might need some support at some point." (Statutory sector KI)

> "To be perfectly honest, [the] Homelessness Reduction Act in Newcastle has been a bit of a damp squib… it just didn't acknowledge that if you're a good-performing local authority and you were doing upstream prevention, it didn't place any value on that… all our good work is happening…

much pre-56 days… if you were starting off from being a poor-performing local authority, I have no doubt the Homelessness Reduction Act will have a massive impact because it's bringing you to the table and forcing you to do stuff, but in Newcastle… they were already performing so way above what the remit of the Homelessness Reduction Act is, I just, I don't think it's really made a difference." (Social housing sector KI)

Indeed, it was a commonly held view that while the HRA was an improvement on the previous legislative regime that saw people as at risk only when homelessness was likely within 28 days, it still essentially required only a 'crisis response' to homelessness rather than genuinely early prevention: *"the Homelessness Reduction Act is, obviously, we've got to comply with that legislation but again, it's all about crisis management, it's not really about working upstream"* (Statutory sector KI). This was seen to reflect that the legislation had been *"driven by particular pressures in other parts of the country"* and that *"it probably would have looked different"* (Third sector KI) if drawn up specifically to enhance homelessness responses in Newcastle.

Key informants and frontline workers voiced other ways in which the HRA *"doesn't go far enough"* (Statutory sector KI), in particular in relation to the Duty to Refer. Key issues here were the absence of Clinical Commissioning Groups and GPs from the list of public authorities under the duty; that the Home Office is not required and does not give 56 days notice that asylum seeking household will be leaving Home Office provided accommodation and in need of rehousing (a particular issue where the household is a large family and finding appropriate accommodation can be challenging); that the information required during the referral process is *"pretty sparse and minimal"* and thus of limited utility (Third sector KI); and that data protection and security concerns (though reportedly allayed by the Ministry of Justice) were currently preventing Community Rehabilitation Company resettlement teams from providing sufficient information to 'receiving authorities' about prisoners' due for release[34]. One key informant also raised concerns about how well Personalised Housing Plans were working, explaining that households tended to be reluctant to engage in wider planning until their housing situation was more secure:

> "ultimately when people present it's, 'Keep a roof over my head. That's what I need.' Until people are ready to accept support around those other causes, those other pressures, no matter what you do, it won't happen…. What they tend to find is, as soon as that housing issue is, in the client's eyes, resolved, nothing else gets done." (Third sector KI)

A further set of comments made regarding the HRA link back to the impacts of welfare cuts and reforms on people's capacity to afford and sustain housing (see chapter three), and is summarised in a Newcastle City Council's Cabinet report on the Homelessness Reduction Act as follows:

> "There is a question about where the funding comes from to secure accommodation when a resident can't afford it and the costs are not covered by welfare benefits…. The Act does not reconcile the disconnection between the welfare benefits system and housing costs." (NCC, 2018j, p.3)

Relatedly, while the Act's emphasis on assessing applicants support needs was welcomed, it was noted that it does not place an obligation on authorities or partners to respond to those needs, and

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[34] The key issue here appears to be that Community Rehabilitation Company's are dissatisfied with the level of security protection on the generic Duty to Refer email addresses set up by local authorities.

that the context for its implementation is one in which housing-related support budgets (formerly Supporting People) are no longer ring-fenced, wider LA budgets cut radically, and spending on housing-related support has reduced dramatically (see chapter three). As this key informant explains, however, the Newcastle political context was seen to be a positive one in which the 'spirit' of the Act to not only identify but better address applicants wider support needs could be addressed, albeit within this straightened context:

> "the Homelessness Reduction Act doesn't do anything to respond to the needs identified. What it does do is create a framework which is positive, and we really support [that] way of working, in identifying those needs. Where we're fortunate is that we've got a local authority that wants to respond to those needs [not just identify them]" (Statutory sector KI).

Local briefings indicate that the most commonly reported support needs among applicants relate to mental health, followed by physical health issues and an offending history (NCC, 2019b).

Preventing evictions from supported accommodation provision in the city
Prevent evictions from supported accommodation in the city forms of secondary homelessness prevention in Newcastle and local briefings offer a source of information and data on this aspect of the activity and performance in this area (albeit with comparisons with other core cities not possible). To give a sense of scale, during 2017/18, 621 individuals were admitted to supported accommodation, with key informants reporting a total 720 bed spaces in the city. Details about the needs of those residing in supported accommodation are recorded under the Supported Housing Move On protocol and indicate that the largest proportion of those in support accommodation (consistently over 50% of assessments per quarter) require further support, with around a quarter assessed as likely to require long term support and the remaining fifth (94 people) ready to move to independent living. Compared to these numbers, only a relatively small number of individuals in Supported Accommodation (20-30 per quarter) appear to submit an application to Tyne and Wear Homes (the regional choice-based lettings partnership). In 2017/18, the most common recorded 'positive' move on destination from supported accommodation was another supported accommodation placement (27%), followed by accessing an independent tenancy (18%), and moving in with friends/family (13%) (the statistics in this paragraph are taken from NCC, 2019b). It was acknowledged by key informants that even these 'positive' moves between supported accommodation placements likely include an element of more problematic 'churn' through services (see below), as well as more positive moves from crisis to supported accommodation.

Key to homelessness prevention is the management of evictions from supported accommodation and locally held data indicates that during 2017/18, there were 67 evictions from supported accommodation with around the same 'pace' evident in the first two quarters of 2018/19 (NCC, 2019b). Available data does not separate out reasons for eviction, and move on destination subsequent to eviction, for crisis versus supported accommodation (and the majority of evictions are from crisis accommodation, see below). The combined data, however, suggests that violence to other staff/residents and disruptive behaviour are the primary drivers, albeit with rent arrears, unspecified 'other' causes and (to a lesser extent) drug and alcohol abuse also important. The combined data also suggests that a very high proportion of those evicted from crisis or supported accommodation leave no forwarding address.

A separate internal segmentation analysis of Newcastle Gateway data (NCC, 2018b) showed that for the proportion of the Newcastle homeless population who experience longer-duration

homelessness, are episodically or chronically homeless, there are substantial levels of churn through placements (NCC, 2018b) [35]. Taken together, these figures *could* be indicative of supported accommodation and evictions from it playing some role in fuelling repeat homelessness, something that some key informants identified as a significant problem in the city: *"What [Newcastle] has is a problem of severe entrenched complex needs, and people going around the system without those needs being met and while they're bouncing around various systems, picking up all kinds of [other problems]"* (Third sector KI). Such a view is lent some support by the statutory statistics covered in previous sections, and available evidence on the role of hostels and supported accommodation from across the UK (Mackie et al, 2017; Watts et al, 2018; McMordie, 2018), and indeed has been a theme raised in previous reviews and evaluations of Newcastle's homelessness response (Fitzpatrick et al, 2011; NCC, 2013).

To the extent that the drivers of eviction and churn identified above could be reduced or ameliorated by changes to hostel design and management (e.g. moves to Psychologically Informed Environments, to smaller congregate accommodation units, and/or towards self-contained rather than congregate supported accommodation, including Housing First provision) or more effective support provision (especially to those groups more likely to 'churn' through the system), this could be a route to gains in the homelessness prevention arena. This is an area of service development in Newcastle: a Service Improvement Lead, funded under the Homelessness Prevention Trailblazer (see above), has been recruited to increase access to emergency/supported beds and reduce evictions from supported accommodation, with evictions protocols currently under review. Move-on assessments and processes are also currently subject to review, with a specific focus on assessments of 'readiness to move on' and the challenges preventing people from doing so (NCC, 2019b). A Housing First project has operated in Newcastle since 2012, albeit that key informants were of the view that the scale of provision was currently very small, and expressed concerns about the fidelity of the model to HF principles, and thus its effectiveness (see chapter seven).

Preventing homelessness following institutional stays

Newcastle City Council has developed a series of protocols to work with local hospitals to avoid people becoming homeless at the point of discharge, and these were in place and fully operative prior to hospitals' new duty to refer under the Homelessness Reduction Act. In 2017/18, a total of 80 referrals were received regarding patients experiencing issues with their housing – just over half from general hospitals and the rest from the city's mental health hospital. Locally reported data suggest that these processes in general secure positive outcomes, with no referrals ending in a stay in temporary accommodation or a homelessness presentation, and the vast majority leaving hospital to accommodation of their own or to stay with friends/family (NCC, 201e). YHN also provide support to patients and hospital staff to assist those in housing need, often working with existing tenants during/after an inpatient stay to secure them suitable accommodation where their current tenancy is no longer appropriate. This key informant with national level expertise of local authorities' prevention work explained that Newcastle is a clear leader in the field in this area:

> "[Newcastle] have good protocols set-up with local hospitals, so that works and again, that's not a given. I was surprised how many authorities… even some of the basic nuts and bolts just aren't there for so many authorities. I got sick of signposting people to Newcastle's website to say, 'if

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[35] The three groups discussed here are contrasted with the short-term transitionally homeless who have experienced one 'episode' of homelessness for no more than 9 months.

you need a hospital discharge policy, have a look at theirs, re-write it for your own needs and then build a relationship with your local hospital teams'" (Third sector KI)

Relationships with prisons regarding the housing of people released from custody appear to be less well developed than those with hospitals. The Housing Advice Centre received 46 referrals during 2017/18, with most of these ending in the securing of accommodation for the individual in question (NCC, 2018e). In addition, some individuals are directly admitted to commissioned accommodation on release. Prisons and the probation service are now subject to the Duty to Refer under the HRA, albeit that data security concerns appear to be compromising probation services' willingness to share information about prisoners due for release. The City Council are working with relevant partners to develop approaches to the Duty to Refer similar to those in place with hospitals.

Institutional discharge process from asylum seeker accommodation were squarely identified as the most problematic by key informants and frontline workers given that the local authority do not receive 56 days notice of the Home Office's intention to discharge households (see above).

Crisis prevention

The final 'crisis' component of homelessness prevention activity in Newcastle focuses on preventing or minimising the duration of homelessness among those who are literally homelessness. This activity spans temporary accommodation responses for those approaching statutory services with nowhere to stay that night, and outreach activity focused on people sleeping rough (who may or may not have approached the local authority as homeless).

Temporary accommodation

Under homelessness legislation, local authorities have duties to provide interim accommodation (to households they have reason to believe are homeless, eligible and have a priority need) and temporary accommodation (to priority need household until a suitable offer of settled accommodation has been made (under the 'main rehousing duty')). Figure 22 shows the number of households in TA at March 2018 across the core cities with figure 3 showing the rate of households in TA as a percentage for core cities over the last decade.

Simply comparing the numbers in different types of TA in the core cities reveals an almost staggering diversity. Newcastle, and also Leeds, Leicester and Liverpool, were making very little use of TA at all at March 2018. Birmingham and Manchester were making massive use of it, with more than a thousand households in each case, while Bristol had 500 and Nottingham over 200.

In terms of the kinds of TA provision used, of the 25 households in TA in Newcastle at March 2018, 8 were in hostels and 17 in the local authority's statutory temporary accommodation. This latter group will primarily be accommodated in Cherry Tree View, a purpose built single site facility of 45 temporary flats to accommodate families and single households. Cherry Tree View is used for emergency placement from YHN and (given insufficient capacity elsewhere) social care, as well as to accommodate statutory homeless households. This stands in contrast to other 'low using' core cities (Liverpool, Leicester and Leeds) who rely more heavily on hostels, and is in very stark contrast to the highly diverse TA portfolios of the high TA using core cities. Birmingham, for instance, use a lot of B&B, private leasing and local authority stock, Manchester mainly private rent, Bristol a lot of private nightly-let self-contained plus housing association stock, and Nottingham mainly hostels. Newcastle is noteworthy for using no B&B accommodation at all to fulfil its homelessness duties (since 2006).

Around half of English local authorities make some use of B&B, with the substantial proportion of that in London, and high use also evident in Birmingham.

Figure 22: The Temporary Accommodation Mix across Core Cities, March 2018 (number of households)
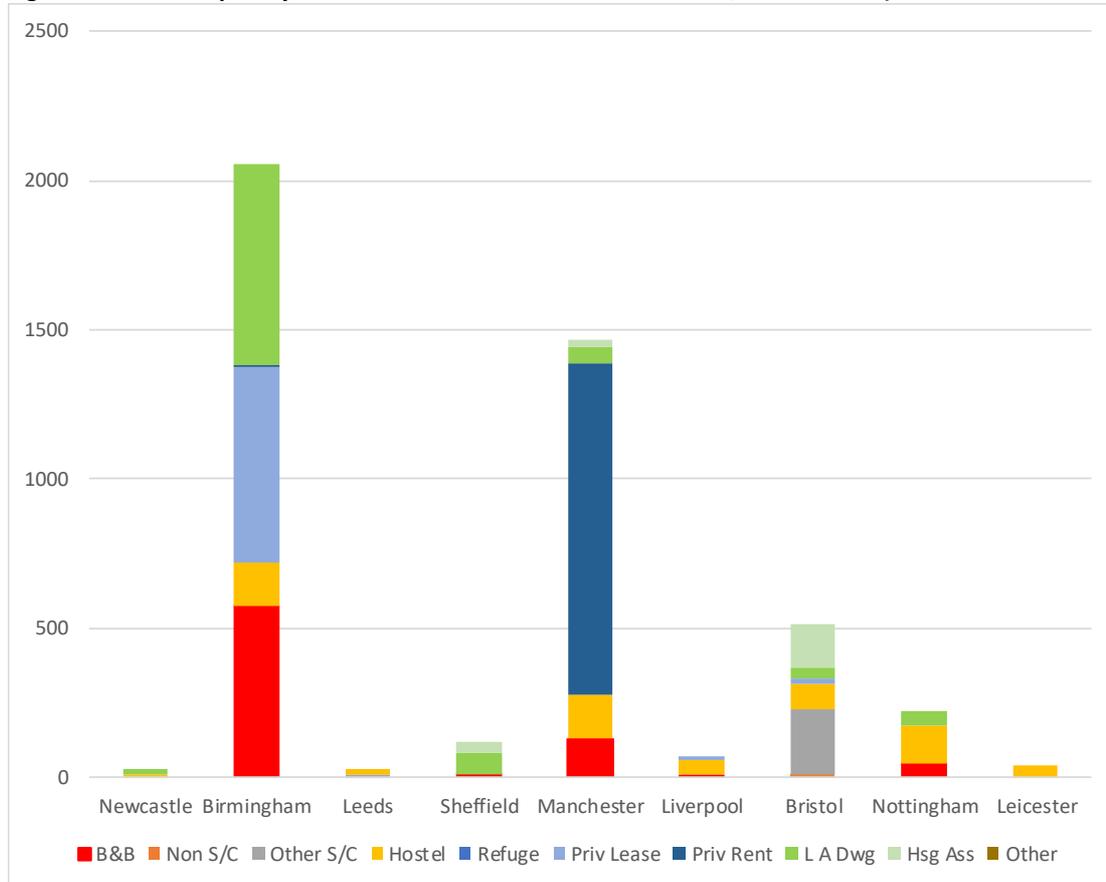
Note: this figure excludes Central London where TA numbers are very high and less comparable to the other core cities. Newcastle is shown first with other core cities in size order from left to right.

Looking at trends over time (figure 23), it is clear that central London generally has a higher rate of use of TA than the other core cities. In fact, most of the core cities tend to have relatively low TA rates, certainly compared with London and also compared with parts of southern England, although Manchester and Birmingham have seen substantial increases in TA use over the last 2-4 years. What is exceptionally clear is that Newcastle has among the lowest rates of TA use among core cities, with rates of TA use equally low in the HMA surrounding Newcastle. TA use in Newcastle has fluctuated to a degree over time (albeit always at a very low level), from 32 households a decade ago, to 45 at March 2013, down to just 25 at March 2018.

It is worth noting alongside this snapshot 'stock' data of households in TA at March each year that the numbers 'flowing through' TA are much higher. In the first two quarters of 2018/19, for instance, 115 households were admitted to Cherry Tree View in accordance with duties owed under the HRA. A handful of additional placements were made via the Housing Advice Centre into a refuge catering for those at risk of/experiencing domestic abuse.

Figure 23: Households in Temporary Accommodation ('stock' number at 31 March as percent of households)
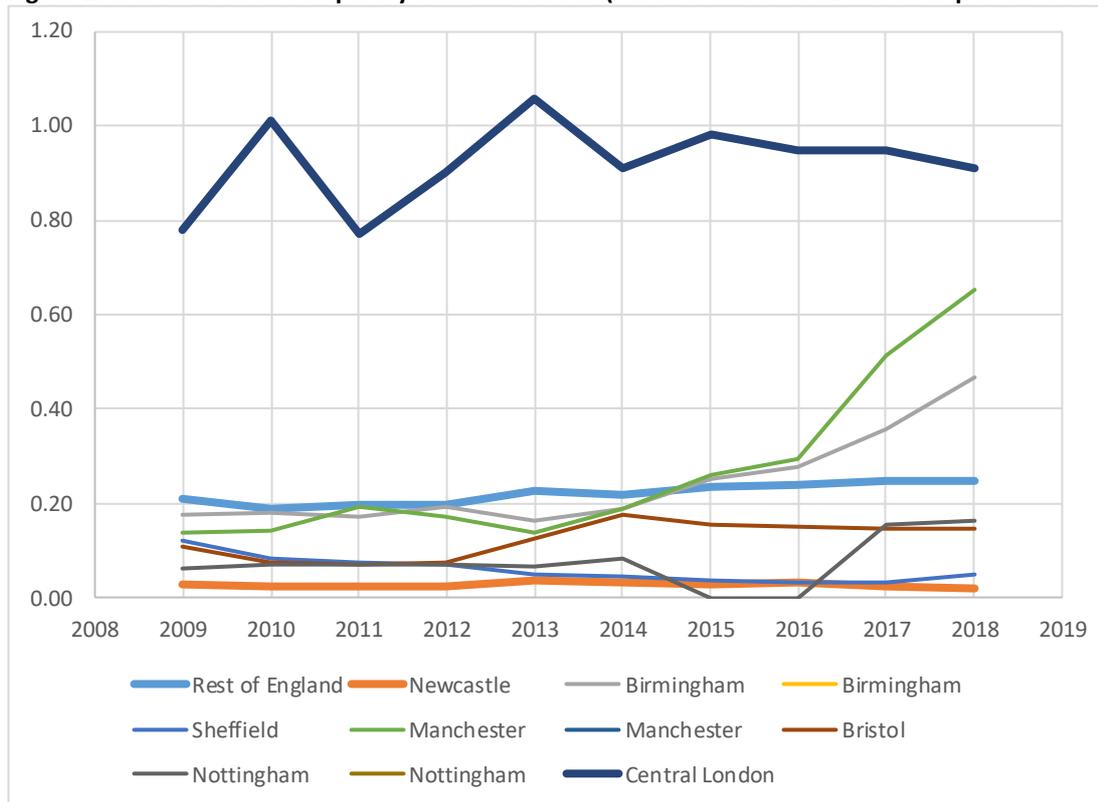
As noted above, new obligations under the Homelessness Reduction Act have led to a greater use of emergency accommodation in the city, this being because the local authority now aim to offer interim accommodation to all of those who are eligible for assistance and literally homeless. Similar trends are evident elsewhere (see LGA, 2019). During 2017/18, there were a total of 146 admissions to emergency beds in the city, but this annual figure has already been exceeded during the first two quarters of 2018/19, during which there have been 229 admits to emergency beds. Of these, 85% stay in the initial emergency placements for 7 days or less, moving on to alternative emergency or supported accommodation. A high proportion of those entering emergency accommodation (27%) have abandoned the placement so far in 2018/19 (NCC, 2019b). It is not clear where these households end up and, in particular, the extent to which they access suitable/sustainable alternatives; unsuitable/unstable accommodation that is likely to see them re-present as homeless at a later date; or even whether in some cases abandonment could be linked to rough sleeping.

Rough sleeping response
The backbone of Newcastle's response to rough sleeping is a daily outreach service and mix of in total around 720 emergency beds, and crisis and supported accommodation spaces. Members of the public are able to report instances of rough sleeping via a dedicated email address or phone number. Rough sleepers identified via outreach are recorded on the single client record system, Newcastle Gateway, tying them into the services and referral mechanisms outlined above.

There have been two recent key developments in the rough sleeping response in Newcastle. First, in pursuance of the city council's *'everyone's business'* approach to homelessness and homelessness prevention, 2018 saw the launch of the Street Zero partnership[36]. The partnership brings together

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[36] See http://streetzero.org/

public, private, charity and faith-based organisations around the aim of ending rough sleeping in Newcastle by 2022. The partnership will develop a place-based, whole-city plan, involving a focus on: realigning existing and generating new resources, developing a co-ordinated public communications strategy, identifying missed opportunities for prevention, and holding partners to account in relation to their alignment with the agreed approach. The evolving approach now includes the use of MHCLG funding to improve access to the Private Rented Sector among those sleeping rough; a new post within the local authority focused on understanding rough sleeping and enhancing responses to it; and an examination of the outcomes where people rough sleeping without a local connection were offered reconnection with another area that they subsequently refused. This reflects the view voiced by several voluntary key informants, frontline housing advice workers that Newcastle *"rigorously sometimes enforce local connection"* (Third sector KI), which enables them to transfer homeless households without an established connection to the area to an alternative authority where such a connection does exist (see chapter seven). It was also noted that 'exclusions criteria' relating to eviction from supported accommodation for violent behaviour, and dog ownership, operate to limit the assistance available to those sleeping rough in the city. One voluntary sector key informant explained that these *"aren't published exemptions, they're not on the Street Zero website, but in reality those are the exemptions that they're working with at the moment"*.

The second key development in relation to rough sleeping responses is Newcastle City Council's involvement – along with six surrounding authorities – in the MHCLG Rough Sleeping Social Impact Bond (see MHCLG, 2018a). The national charity, Changing Lives, have 3.5 years of funding on a social investment payments by results basis to achieve a suite of outcomes for people sleeping rough across the seven areas, including entering and sustaining accommodation, entry and sustained engagement with mental health and substance misuse services, and outcomes related to volunteering, training, education and employment[37]. A multidisciplinary team (see above) approach has been adopted to respond to the severe and multiple disadvantages facing entrenched rough sleepers (NCC, 2017).

The scale of rough sleeping in Newcastle is discussed in the next chapter, but available local data indicates that the most common *reason* people reported for sleeping rough in 2017/18 was being evicted from or abandoning hostel/supported accommodation. 'Unknown' reasons and relationship breakdown were also prevalent with a much smaller but notable group sleeping rough having been discharged from institutions (according to frontline workers, primarily prison). This data points to further opportunities for prevention at the acute end, focused on improving institutional discharge protocols and, of fundamental importance, the quality and management of the city's crisis, emergency and supported accommodation, including improving eviction protocols and understanding reasons for abandonment.

These issues may have been exacerbated by NCC's decision (see chapter three), in the face of swingeing budget gets, to retain the quantity of supported accommodation, but with reduced staffing, which key informants were clear had *"reduced the quality of the offer"* (Statutory sector KI). Improvements in this area could reduce rough sleeping in the city. NCC acknowledge some of this when they comment: *"we know that Newcastle needs to move from a hostel by default model, to a housing by default model, to move people into settled accommodation as rapidly as possible and move on from homelessness and a life on the streets"* (NCC, 2019b, p.15). A statutory key informant reiterated this view, explaining that *"We now want to move, we think, to lower numbers, but higher*

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[37] See https://golab.bsg.ox.ac.uk/knowledge/project-database/rough-sleeping-social-impact-bond/

quality, so that we can better meet need" (Statutory sector KI). However, the development of a specific plan to do so are not yet evident in the city's quarterly briefings, nor in the key informant interviews conducted for this study and are likely constrained by the substantial resource implications of such a move in the context of highly restricted available funding.

Conclusion

Newcastle City Council has thus developed a rich set of approaches to homelessness prevention that seek to identify households at risk, reduce the chances of homelessness occurring, and where it does, minimise its duration. This network of layered approaches extend far beyond the city's statutory duties under both pre- and post- Homelessness Reduction Act law, and can be characterised as: (1) *weighted towards upstream 'primary' prevention* seeking to secure Newcastle residents the makings of a stable life (having a home, an income, being financially included and employed) and thus reduce the likelihood of homelessness, with interventions targeting those displaying early signs of homelessness risk (2) *partnership driven* reflecting the view that homelessness prevention is – and in a context of long-term and deep austerity must be – 'everyone's business', (3) *proactive*, both at the *policy level* in seeking to maximise opportunities for contact with at-risk homeless households by engaging all relevant partners and equipping them to provide substantive prevention interventions where possible and effectively referring to appropriate services, and at the *practice level* in being creative in how to identify, contact, engage and maintain relationships with households at risk and (4) *data and evidence driven*, with a strong focus on collecting, reporting, sharing, and continuous learning from relevant statistics and information relevant to homelessness prevention.

Newcastle has taken advantage of various Central Government funding opportunities, including the Entrenched Rough Sleeper Social Impact Bond, and crucially, the Homelessness Prevention Trailblazer funding, though stakeholders were in agreement that the HRA itself had not substantially improved homelessness prevention given the volume and early intervention focus of existing practice. But what perhaps most characterises developments in Newcastle are the plethora of governance structures, partnerships, referral routes and interventions that have been developed locally, quite separate from Central Government programmes or policies, and indeed in spite of the challenges of cuts to local government funding and necessitated in large part by the impacts of welfare reforms. Examples include the Active Inclusion Newcastle Unit and wider approach; the maintenance of a large internal welfare rights services; protocols related to eviction from the social rented sector and seeking to prevent homelessness among those leaving institutions; and most recently the Street Zero partnership.

While the analysis presented here suggests that Newcastle has developed a strong and wide spectrum of interventions and approaches spanning what they described as primary, secondary and crisis homelessness prevention, it indicates a clear weighting towards early intervention, with services at the secondary and crisis level clearly having some limitations. In particular, protocols for leaving some institutions (asylum seeker accommodation and prisons) are not working as effectively as they could be, reportedly due to issues on the originating institution side. Evictions and abandonment from the city's crisis, emergency and supported accommodation appear to be an enduring issue, particularly for those with complex needs who seem to be at risk of 'churning' through the system for long periods. This is despite ongoing efforts to monitor, review and improve issues in this area, and recognition of the need to shift towards a housing-led response. The resources to achieve this transition are one clear barrier in the current context. Finally, there is concern that some people sleeping rough in Newcastle face barriers to accessing support and/or accommodation

due to providers unwillingness to accommodate those with a history of violence in supported/crisis accommodation, and also due to local connection rules. We return to these themes in chapter seven.

The next chapter triangulates a range of primarily quantitative data on the scale of, trends in, and profile of homelessness in Newcastle to begin to consider the impact of this work on homelessness, where possible relative to other core cities. The following chapters (six and seven) use qualitative data gathered for this study to further unpick the strengths of Newcastle's approach, and identify areas for the further future improvement of these prevention efforts.

5. Homelessness in Newcastle: scale, trends and profile

In this chapter, we turn to a variety of administrative and household survey-based data sources to unpack the scale and profile of homelessness in Newcastle, and trends over time and drivers of homelessness, relative to other core cities. In light of understanding the context for and nature of the city's homelessness prevention work in previous chapters, the analysis provides tools for assessing the success and limits of homelessness prevention work to date, and identifying areas where future preventative efforts may be focused or further developed. The chapter begins by considering where Newcastle sits in relation to other core cities in terms of statutory homelessness, before examining levels of rough sleeping in Newcastle and elsewhere. The final sections of the chapter draws on a parallel work examining levels of 'core homelessness' across the UK, and projections for and drivers of future trends in homelessness.

Statutory homelessness: levels and trends

Hitherto the most widely quoted homelessness number in England has been the number of households accepted as homeless by local authorities. This measures the group of households who have applied to the local authority and been assessed as homeless, or at risk of homelessness within 28 days, unintentionally, and in a 'priority need' group. This is the group to which local authorities owe the 'main homelessness duty', essentially leading to the offer of settled rehousing in many/most cases. In the year to March 2018, this number was 54,259 across England and 217 in Newcastle. In terms of absolute numbers, this is the second lowest number of acceptances across the core cities, with only Leicester having a lower figure. Over the decade from 2009, homeless acceptances in England rose in every year, except 2017/18, from 39,550 in 2009 to 58,665 in 2016/17. In Newcastle, by contrast, homeless acceptances in 2018 were a bit below the figures of 2009/10, although above the numbers in the years 2012-2017, but the fluctuations were not large.

Figure 24 shows homeless acceptances expressed as a percentage of all resident households, for the ten core cities and the rest of England. It shows a highly diverse picture, with several core cities showing much higher rates than Newcastle, and much greater year-to-year fluctuations in some cases. We would caution that there have long been and remain significant differences of policy implementation and administrative practice in dealing with homeless applications, between different authorities, and in some cases between different time periods for the same authority. These may account for some of these differences and fluctuations.

This data suggests that Newcastle is among the group of core cities with relatively lower rates of homelessness acceptances, with a rate most similar to its northern peers Sheffield and Liverpool. Core cities with higher acceptance rates in recent years include Birmingham, Bristol, Nottingham, and Newcastle's peer northern city Manchester. Central London has traditionally had high rates of homeless acceptances but this difference appears to have diminished, for reasons which are not entirely clear but may include the strong trend for low income households to be pushed out of central London by housing market forces (gentrification) and welfare reforms (capping of benefits and LHA rent limits) (Fitzpatrick et al, 2018b, 2019).

Trends in the rate of acceptances in Newcastle are distinct, and marked by their stability and the absence of sharp changes of direction over time seen in many other cities. The gradual trends evident

are of a slow decline to 2014 (as the England-wide rate was rising), relative stability to 2017 and then an uptick in the most recent year just as England-wide increases abated and there were declines in many of the core cities. Only Nottingham and Sheffield saw a similar uptick in this recent period, though as Fitzpatrick et al (2019) note, it is possible that the 2017/18 statistics have been impacted by preparations for transition to the HRA framework, and that such work was more advanced in some regions than others. It may be, for instance, that reductions in acceptances seen in Bristol, Manchester, Birmingham and across the rest of England indicate authorities working in more preventative ways than previously, prior to the new Act coming into force. In Newcastle by contrast, where there has been a longer-term focus on homelessness prevention, the scope for such 'gearing up' impacting on acceptance rates may have been lower.

Figure 24: Homeless Acceptances Rate by Core Cities and Rest of England, 2009-2018 (Number per 100 households, annual)
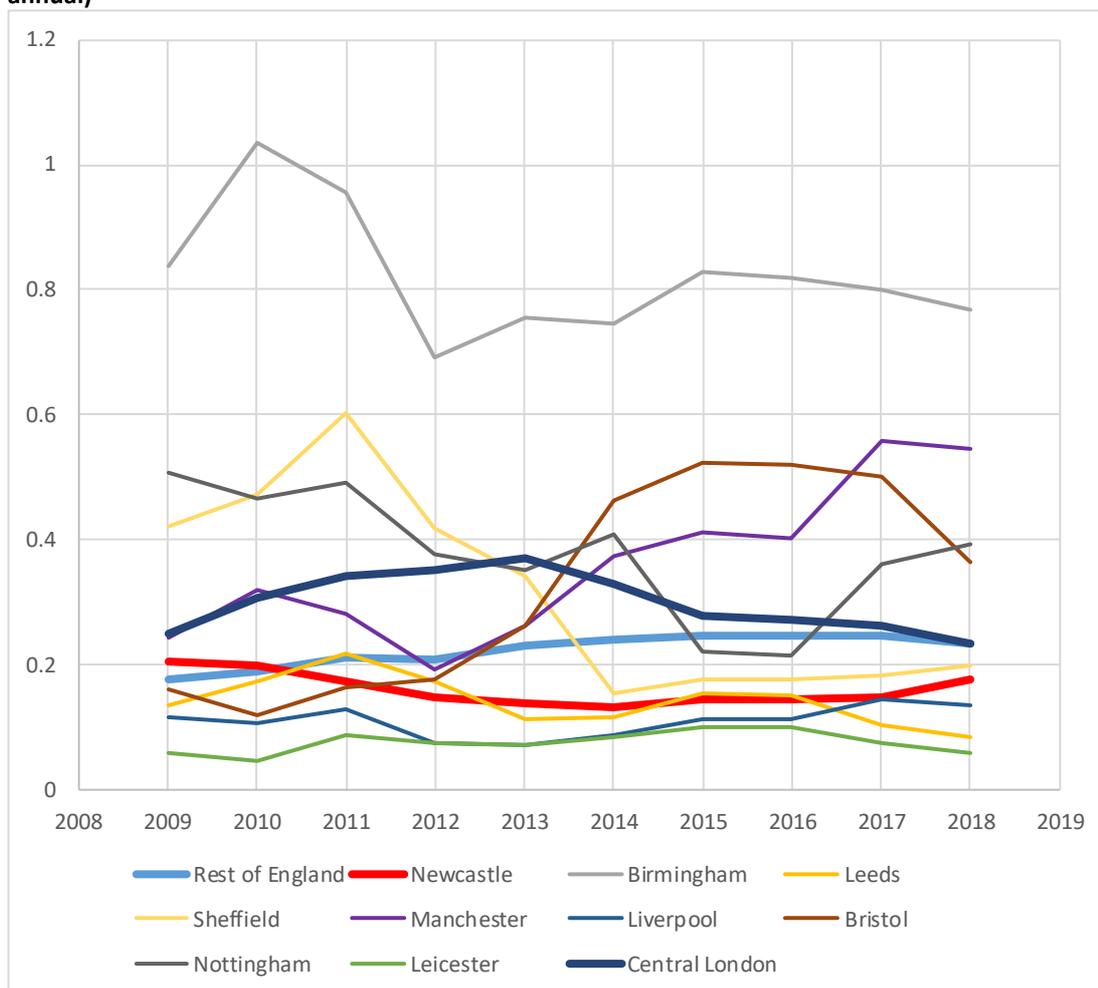
Figure 25 presents the regional picture for the same indicator. Here the generally high rate in London is apparent, although this peaked in 2015. The next highest region is the West Midlands, followed by the East and South East. The North is shown quite clearly to be declining to the lowest level across this period, so Newcastle's relatively low rate of homeless acceptances is part of a wider regional story, explained by the vastly different housing market contexts seen across the English regions (see Fitzpatrick et al, 2019 and chapter three). Interestingly, however, despite Newcastle's lower *rate* of homeless acceptances fitting the wider picture of regional variation, the *trend* does not: the recent rise in Newcastle shows in figure 24 departs from the continuing declining rate of homeless

acceptances across the region shows in figure 25. Caution should be taken to not read too much into this very recent shift (this could be a blip rather than the beginning of a longer term trend), but with that caveat in mind this uptick could (as above) reflect that Newcastle's pre-existing strong emphasis on early homelessness prevention may have meant that the possible 'gearing up' of other areas for new HRA duties has had less of an impact there. It could also suggest that the current preventative approaches deployed in Newcastle are reaching the limit of their efficacy (see below).

Figure 25 Homeless Acceptances Rate by Region, 2009-2018 (Number per 100 households, annual)
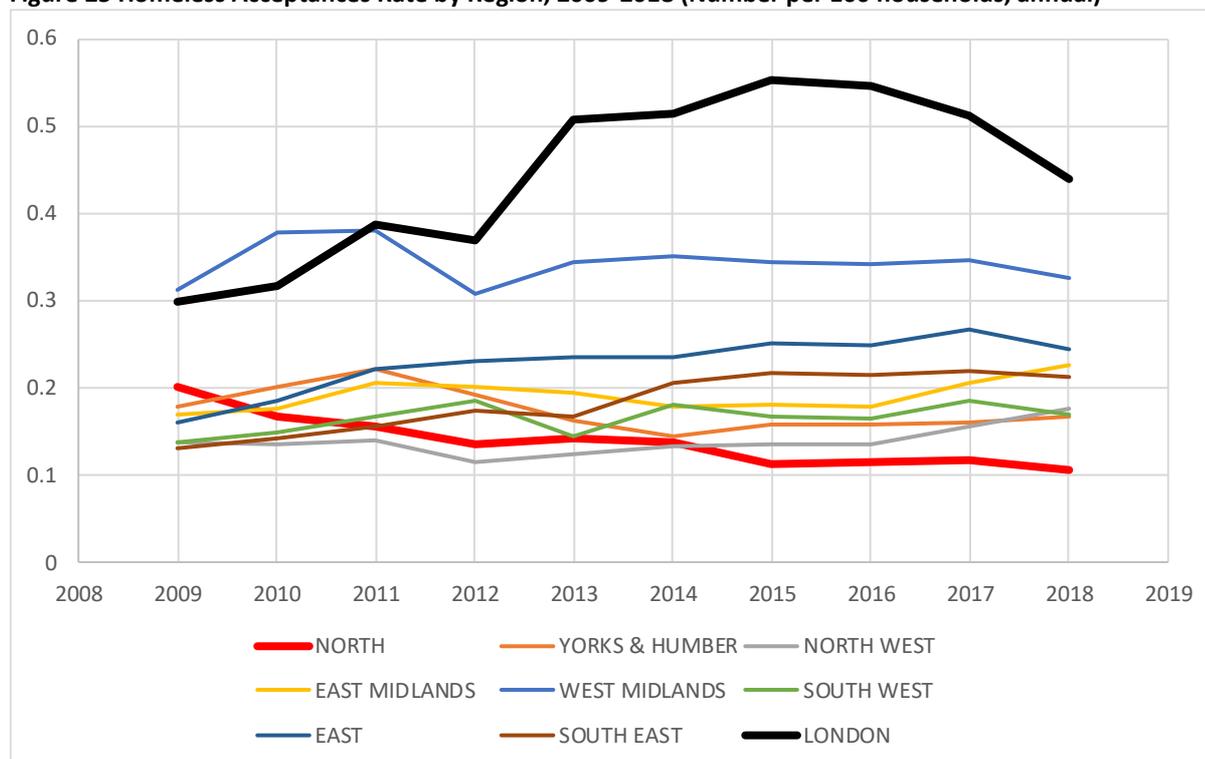
We have also run this analysis comparing each core city with its surrounding 'housing market area' (HMA) authorities. We would normally expect homelessness rates to be higher in core cities, for a number of reasons including concentrations of poverty, certain types of housing (e.g. multi-occupied), attraction of migrants and people leaving home, availability of casual work, and possibly in some cases a concentration of relevant services (e.g. hostels). Indeed, this was the expectation of one key informant who hypothesised that rates of homelessness would be higher in Newcastle than the surrounding arears because people are *"attracted"* to its city status (Third sector KI). However, homeless acceptances rates were nearly always *less* in Newcastle than in the surrounding HMA area (except in 2017-18), which is a relatively unusual situation. Only Leicester and Central London could report something similar. In London, this may once again be explained by factors (high rents and welfare cuts/caps) that have driven poorer households to the edge, rather than the core of the city. In Leicester and Newcastle, it could be explained by homelessness prevention interventions. Newcastle's efforts in this regard have been described in detail in chapter three, and figure 18 in that chapter also provides a high-level indication that Leicester, like Newcastle, is a high user and recorder of preventative interventions. That Newcastle shares a similar housing market context with the rest of its HMA *and* experienced more severe local government budget cuts, higher impacts of welfare reform, and higher rates of destitution and SMD (see chapter three), but *lower* rates of homelessness, may in part explained by the proactive homelessness prevention approaches in place in the city.

Figure 26 below shows trends for a broader definition of homeless *applicants*, including non-priority need cases and those deemed 'intentionally homeless', again for the core cities. Newcastle shows a significant rise in this measure of 'homelessness demand' after 2016, albeit with some falling back of figures in the last year, although this seems to have been a general factor affecting nearly all cities and the national figures, and thus perhaps not to reflect any specifically local dynamics. Newcastle also seems to be more in the middle of the 'core cities pack' on this measure than in terms of the rate of homelessness acceptances, with total applications considerably less than in Birmingham and Manchester, slightly less than in Nottingham and Leeds, the same as in Sheffield, but more than in Leicester, Sheffield, Central London and the rest of England.

Figure 26: Homeless Applications rate including Non-Priority and Intentional Cases by Core City 2013-2018 (Number per 100 households, annual)
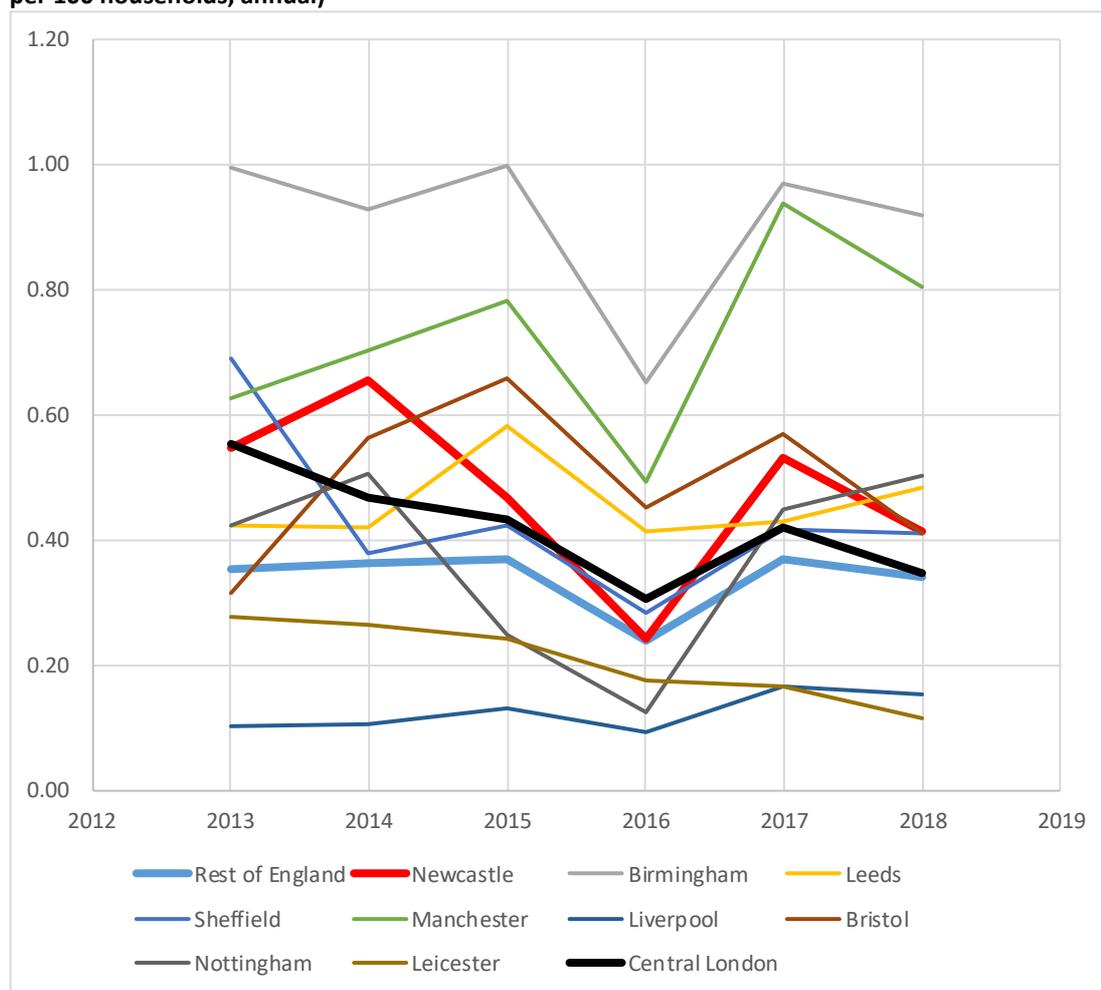
There are other 'annual flow of cases' measures which can be derived from the statutory 'P1E' data returns, but these are generally less consistently recorded between different local authorities, and in some cases vulnerable to double counting. For example, one can count all homeless *decisions*[38]. On this basis, Newcastle appears somewhat higher again in the rankings of core cities, although rates fell between 2014 and 2016.

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[38] Total decisions include all of those accepted as owed the main rehousing duty plus those found to be homeless and in priority need but intentionally so, those found to be not eligible (e.g. certain migrants), those found to be homeless but not in priority need, and those found to be not homeless.

That Newcastle is low in the core cities rankings on homelessness *acceptances*, middle on *applications*, and high on *decisions*, *could* be explained by a number of factors. It could indicate that a higher proportion of applicants are assessed as intentionally homelessness, not in priority need, not homeless and/or not eligible than in other areas. Looking at 2017/18 data, Newcastle record a very low proportion of intentionality decisions (under 1% of decisions compared to around 8% nationally) and only find a quarter of those on whom a decision is reached ineligible (compared to over 50% nationally). Newcastle does, however, make a higher proportion non-priority decisions than elsewhere (a third compared to 17% nationally), as well as not homeless decisions (40% compared to 24% nationally)[39]. One likely explanation for this would be that the city's rich set of early interventions bring higher numbers of households at risk *into* the formal statutory homelessness system than elsewhere (as applications), but that some of those who apply are not yet homeless or at risk (resulting in a not homeless decision), not families (thus by and large not in 'priority need') and/or have their situation ameliorated or resolved prior to a decision being made (resulting in a non-priority or not homeless decision).

A further measure of homelessness combines all homeless acceptance, prevention and relief figures, although here the risk of double counting is substantial (those accepted may have already received prevention or relief interventions). Newcastle had the highest rates on this indicator, among core cities, for most years from 2013. This is likely to reflect, as per figure 18 in chapter three, that Newcastle has been exceptionally active in undertaking and recording prevention and relief activity.

Another final key measure of homelessness provided by the statutory homelessness system is the numbers in temporary accommodation, already reviewed in chapter three (see figures 22 and 23). To summarise, Newcastle makes very little use of temporary accommodation compared to the other core cities in terms of both absolute numbers and population rates. Based on the analysis so far, several key factors are most likely to explain this: first, Newcastle's comparatively less pressured housing market and in particular the greater availability of social housing in the city compared to even other Northern core cities (thus reducing the need for TA in the first place and the flow through it); and second, the prevention efforts described in the previous chapter (which minimise demand for TA). Third, we have also seen that a lower proportion of applicants in Newcastle are found to be in priority need or to be homeless, and this difference in either or both the needs of homeless population in Newcastle or the local authority's approach to assessing priority need and homelessness status is also likely have had a bearing on the numbers in TA. This picture of low TA use is likely to shift going forward given the local authority's aim to offer interim accommodation to all of those who are eligible for assistance under the HRA and 'literally homeless' (NCC, 2019b).

Statutory homelessness: causes and profile

Statutory data also provides information on the reasons for households' homelessness, their accommodation status at the time of application, and their profile in relation to certain demographic characteristics. This section reviews how Newcastle compares to other core cities on these dimensions, highlighting key implications for the study's consideration of homelessness prevention in the city.

Figure 27 shows the most recent full year's figures (percentage shares) on the main reason for loss of previous accommodation by priority needs homeless households. Newcastle is not dissimilar to

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[39] Data presented here are from MHCLG's homelessness summary local authority level Table 784 available at
https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/live-tables-on-homelessness

the overall picture for England, and other cities including Birmingham, Liverpool, and even Central London. The most important reasons last year were loss of assured shorthold private rented sector tenancy, violent relationship breakdown, and other relatives and parents no longer willing to accommodate, though such 'family exclusions' were actually a lower share in Newcastle than nationally and in a number of other cities. The data suggests that interventions targeting households in the private rented sector (e.g. developing relationships and prevention protocols with landlords, further developing the use of 'predictive analytics' to identify PRS tenants at risk) and those seeking to prevent domestic violence and abuse related homelessness (e.g. Sanctuary Schemes) may hold particular value in the future in preventing homelessness in Newcastle, especially among families.

Figure 27: Main reason for loss of previous accommodation among priority need households by core city and England, 2017-18
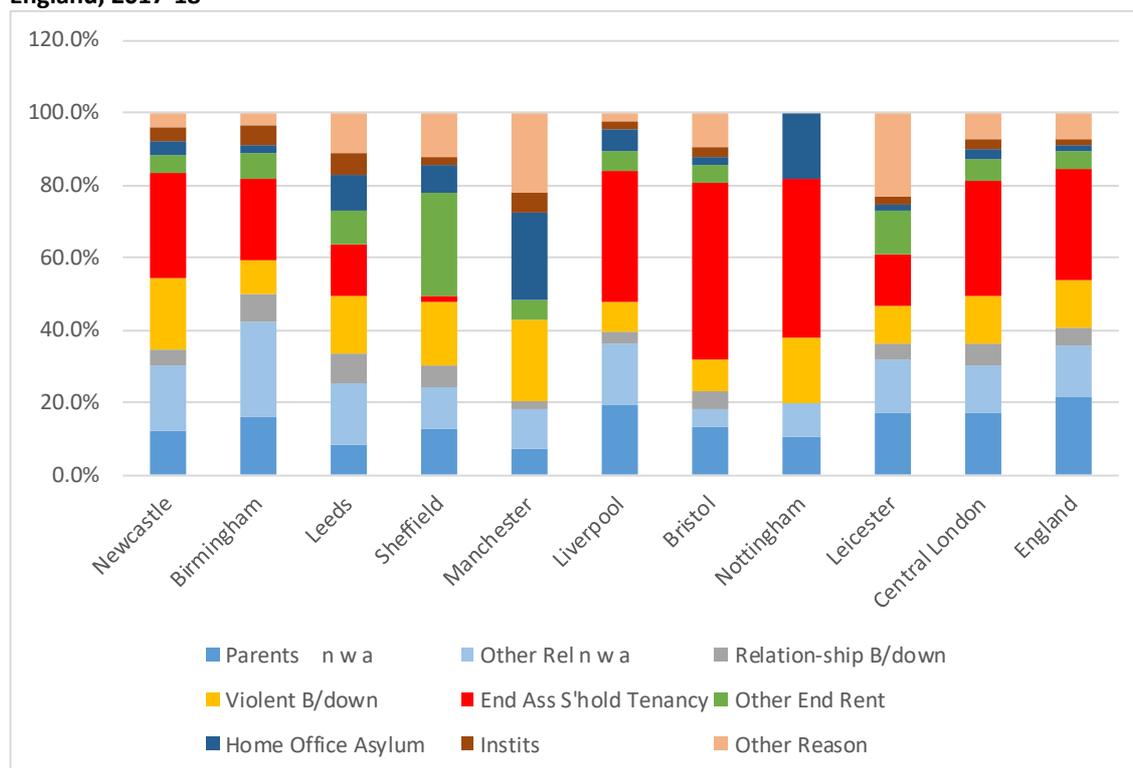
Figure 27 shows some quite big differences in the pattern for some other cities, for example, Sheffield where other forms of loss of rental accommodation (potentially evictions from the social rented sector or supported housing) seem more important, and Manchester where Home Office Asylum cases seem very prominent. The end of private rented tenancies seems to be particularly prevalent in Bristol and Nottingham, which may indicate a more pressured private rental market in those cities.

Figure 28 shows the changes over nearly a decade in these shares, for the individual core cities. Newcastle shows smaller changes than Liverpool, Bristol, Nottingham and Leicester. In common with most other areas including England, loss of private tenancies has increased in importance, as has 'other relatives' no longer willing to accommodate (although this varies more by city). The increase in households losing private tenancies has been the big story in homelessness across England for several years (see Fitzpatrick et al, 2019). The 'other relatives' factor may be a by-product of increases over several years in 'sofa surfing' as a symptom of pressure in the housing system (see discussion of 'core homelessness' below). While the largest decrease in Newcastle has been in parental exclusion, this has also seen a reduced share in the majority of other cities.

Figure 28: Changes in main reason for loss of previous accommodation by core city and England, 2009-18 (percentage points).
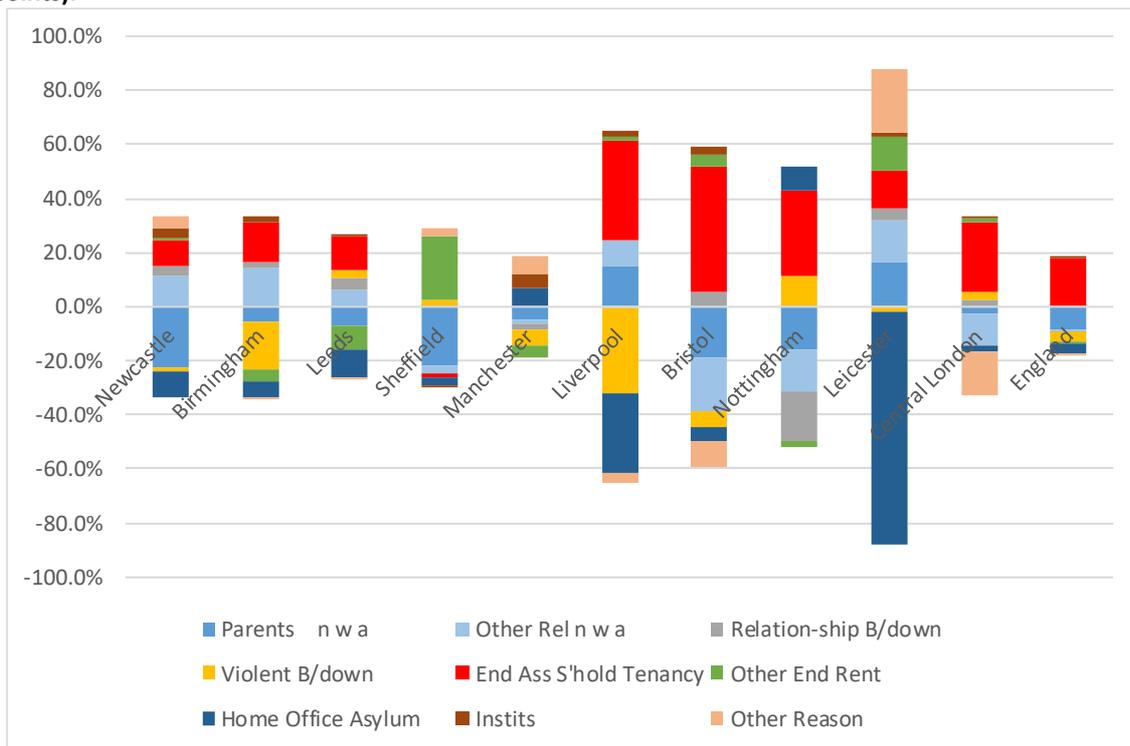
Notes: nwa refers to not willing to accommodate.

The HRA has brought a wider group of households into the statutory system, by introducing 'priority need blind' prevention and relief duties. This is likely to lead to a shift in the balance of the reasons leading to people receiving assistance under the homelessness legislation, and we see this logic bear out in the first quarter of H-CLIC statistics available as shown in figure 29. Beyond this, nationally, we see reduced shares in the categories of family or friends no longer willing or able to accommodate, violent relationship breakdown, and loss of assured shorthold tenancy, and increases in the non-violent relationship breakdown, other loss of rented, and in particular other reasons (including Home Office and ex-institution cases), now the dominant category nationally and in Newcastle. These general shifts in the mix observed for England are also observed in Newcastle's H-CLIC data. Broadly these differences may be as expected as one moves to a population with more single homeless and (proportionally) less families. However, some other core cities show somewhat different patterns: the share of friends and family seems to rise in Bristol and Nottingham, and the loss of private rented accommodation seems to take an increasing share in Birmingham, Manchester, Sheffield and Leicester. 'Other' reasons seem to have a smaller share in Birmingham, Leeds and Manchester.

Figure 29: Main reason for loss of previous accommodation by homeless cases owed prevention or relief duty under HRA by core city and England, 2018 Q2 (percent)
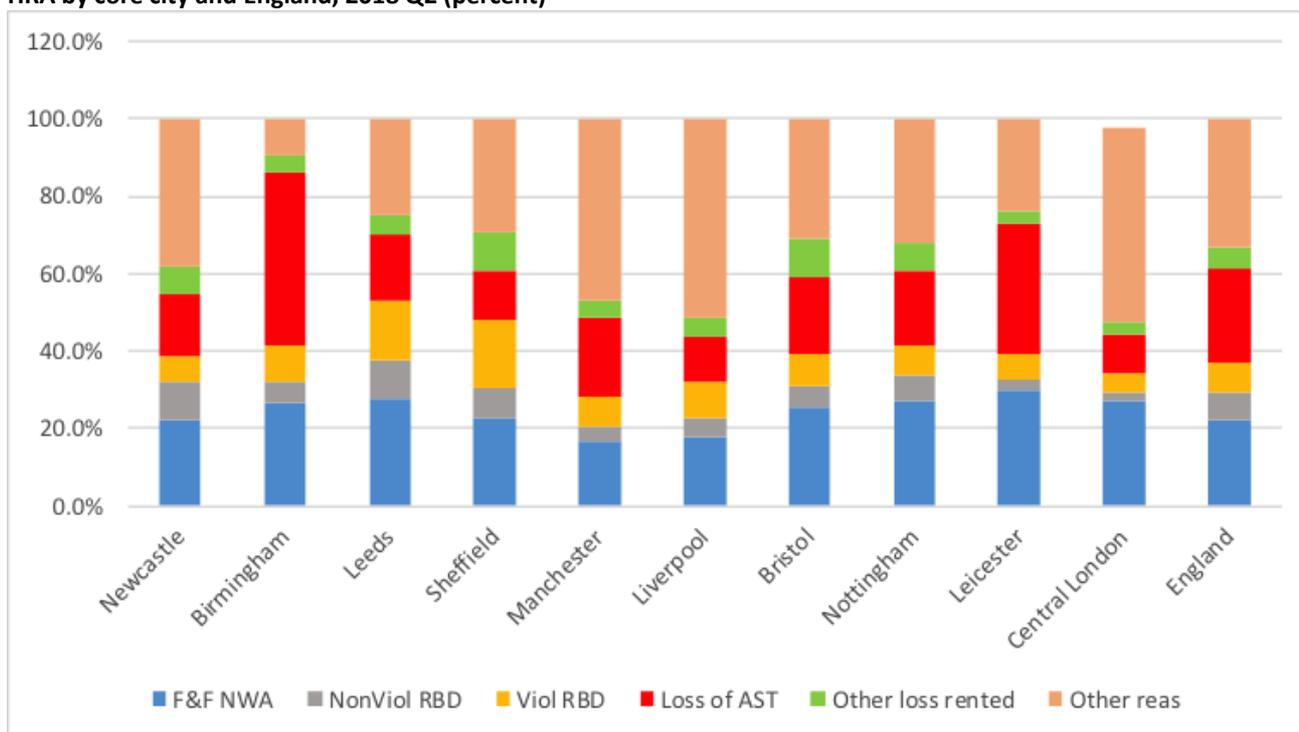
Delving beneath these headlines using locally reported data, focusing on those presenting and owed the prevention duty specifically, the ending of private rented tenancies remains the biggest reason, with family exclusions and non-violent relationship breakdown the next most prominent specific reasons (NCC, 2019b). In terms of those presenting and owed the relief duty, the balance of reasons is slightly different, with family exclusions the most important specified factor, followed by non-violent relationship breakdown, ending of private tenancies, and eviction from supported housing.

Combined, these overall and disaggregated data provide some pointers for the future development of prevention activity in the city. Combined, a third of those presenting are doing so as a result of non-violent relationship breakdown and friends/family no longer willing to accommodate, suggesting a rationale for considering how better prevention targeting these groups might work. They also suggest a continued important role for PRS-focused interventions, but also a need to consider the role of the city's large congregate supported accommodation sector in generating homelessness. According to NCC, the dominant 'other' category comprises in part those leaving student accommodation and those returning from abroad (NCC, 2019b). If future data releases confirm 'leaving student accommodation' as a trigger of homelessness/homelessness risk, it may be that existing protocols for preventing homelessness among those leaving institutions can be adapted to work with higher education institutions and student accommodation providers.

One of the new sets of information collected under H-CLIC is on accommodation at the time of application. Figure 30 shows the patterns from the first quarter of data released for the core cities and England. While for England as a whole private renting accounts for nearly one-third of cases, this is just under one-fifth in Newcastle. More than one-fifth of Newcastle cases are staying with family, and another one-sixth (much higher than in England generally) with friends. Rough sleeping is recorded for less than one-in-twenty (4.5%), but this is higher than the proportion for England (2.5%), though much lower than in Sheffield, Manchester and Central London. Being in temporary

accommodation at the time of application also looks very low in Newcastle (reflecting low levels of households in TA in Newcastle overall). The other/not known category is a little larger in Newcastle than in England overall and a number of core cities and based on analysis above is likely to include at least some individuals residing in supported accommodation.

Figure 30: Accommodation type at time of application by Core City and England, 2018 Q2 (all households owed prevention or relief duty under new HRA)
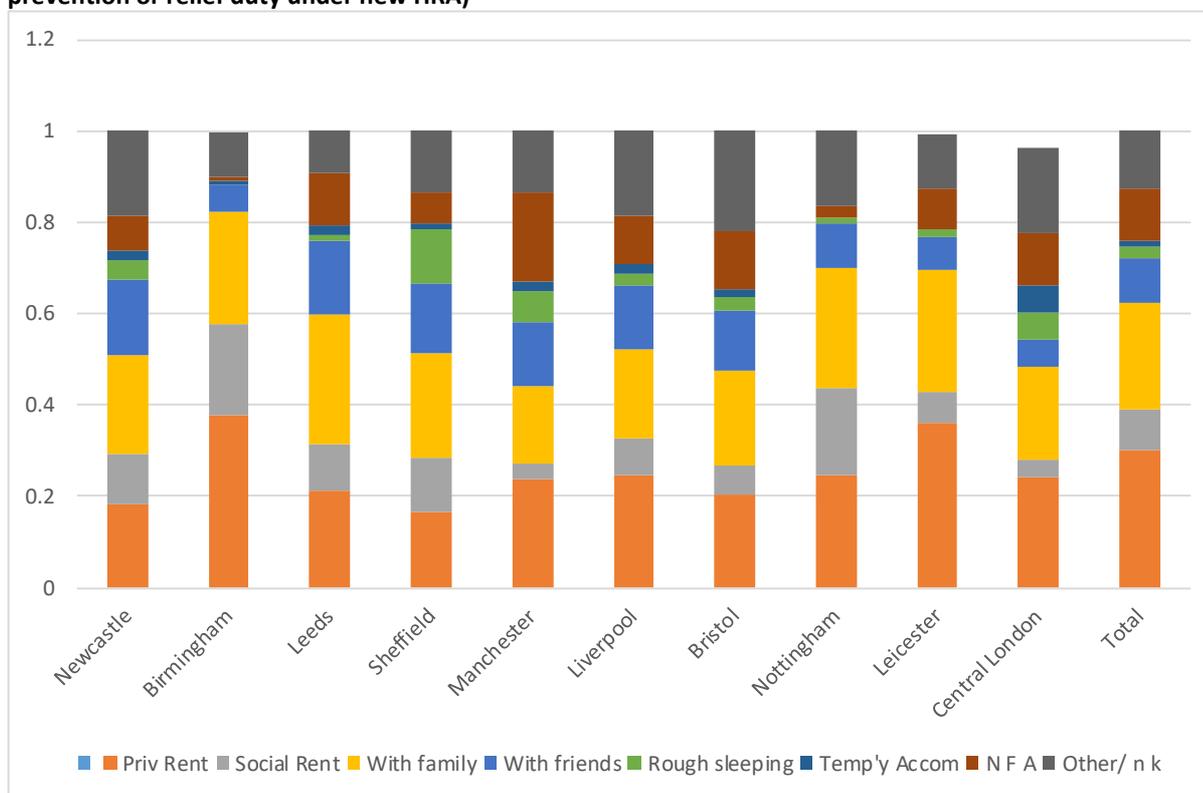
Note: first output of new H-CLIC information system, which may be subject to some inconsistency of coding, for example between No Fixed Abode (NFA) and 'with friends'.

Although 'No fixed abode' (NFA) is a lower proportion in Newcastle than in many other areas, it is worth noting that the statisticians' comments suggest this overlaps with 'with friends', and the combination of the two suggests that the phenomenon of 'sofa surfing' is pretty important generally, including in Newcastle. The regional pattern shows that private renting is more prevalent in the south while staying with friends (and/or NFA) is more common in the North.

Overall this data suggests that while paths to prevention targeting struggling social and private tenants will continue to be very important, finding ways to identify and support more 'hidden' and harder to access groups – those staying with friends and family – is extremely important in making further gains on homelessness prevention, especially in the post-HRA era where the local authority owe duties to a much wider group of households than previously. It also lends cautious support to the recognised need to target prevention efforts at those residing in the supported accommodation sector.

Statutory data also provide information on the demographic characteristics of those accepted as homeless and in priority need (but not for the wider groups applying who might be assisted through prevention or relief). We can see, for example, the age profile of the statutory homeless population

(household heads). On this variable, there is general similarity across the cities and wider areas, with the dominant group (60% or more) being aged 20-44. Figure 31 looks at a summary measure of ethnicity. Non-white ethnic groups have been overrepresented in homelessness statistics over a long period, and that remains the case, as shown here. This applies in Newcastle, where the 45% non-white share is way above their share in the local resident population (14.6% of the all age population in 2011, although probably a significantly higher proportion of the younger adult population in 2018). Such high shares are characteristic of all of the core cities, while cities with larger minority populations show even higher shares (Birmingham, Leicester, London). This implies that visible minority ethnic groups are more vulnerable to homelessness (particularly family homelessness), likely for a range of reasons including poverty, but also being less firmly established in the housing system (in some cases associated with recent migration). Also relevant is that Newcastle is a main Home Office dispersal area.

Figure 31: Non-white ethnic share of homeless priority need acceptances by core city and rest of England, 2018 (percent)
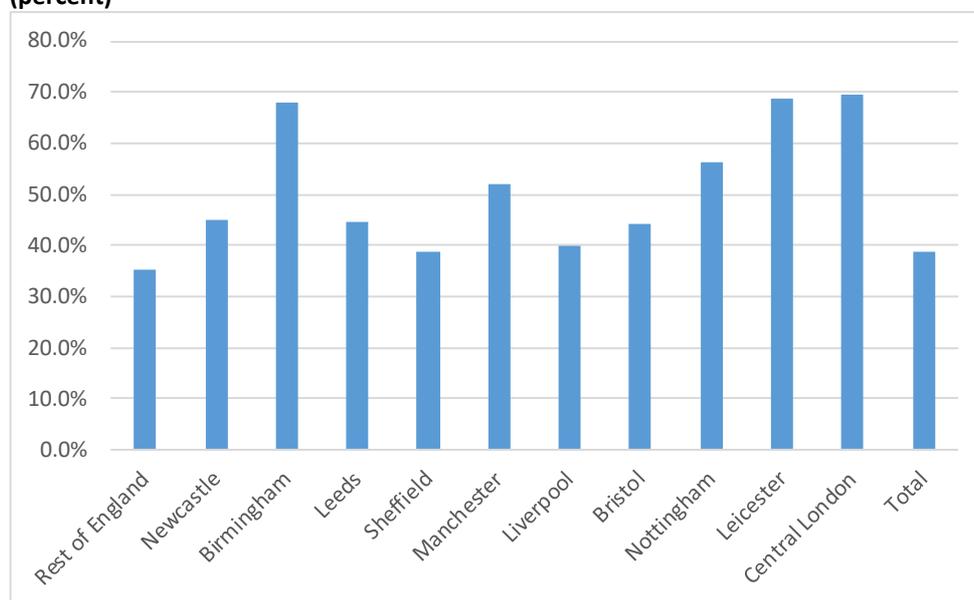
In Figure 32 we look at the household type profile of priority need acceptances across core cities. The general picture across England, and especially in more pressured markets in London and the South, is that most households accepted are families, particularly lone parent families. Single person households are not accepted in large numbers, as they would normally be expected to have very strong evidence of vulnerability to qualify. However, it appears that the application of this priority is quite variable across the cities, in a way that appears to correlate quite strongly with housing market pressure/supply of social rented lettings. We can see that Sheffield and Leeds, and to some extent Liverpool and Manchester, accept quite high shares of single person households, presumably in part because they have enough social housing lettings to do that (see figure 11 in chapter three), as well as because there is a lot of demand from these groups. However, Newcastle is noteworthy for not going down this route, even though its housing market and supply context is similar, and perhaps even more enabling, than these other Northern core cities (see chapter three).

This pattern could be explained by a number of factors, including a distinct demographic make-up of the local population in Newcastle as opposed to other Northern core cities (fewer singles, more families), but inspection of demographic profiles shows that this is not the case. Alternatively, it may

be associated with the strong emphasis on prevention in the city, and its accessibility and/or effectiveness for single households in particular, relative to families (qualitative data considered in chapter seven casts some doubt on this explanation, however). Much more likely is that it reflects local practices in interpreting the vulnerability component of the priority need test – it is possible that other core cities in the North have lowered the threshold for single people to meet this vulnerability threshold in light of the lower housing market pressures, but that Newcastle has not followed suit. These single households will of course be entitled to prevention and relief interventions under the Homelessness Reduction Act, albeit still not the 'full rehousing duty'.

Figure 32: Household type profile of homeless priority need acceptances by core city and rest of England
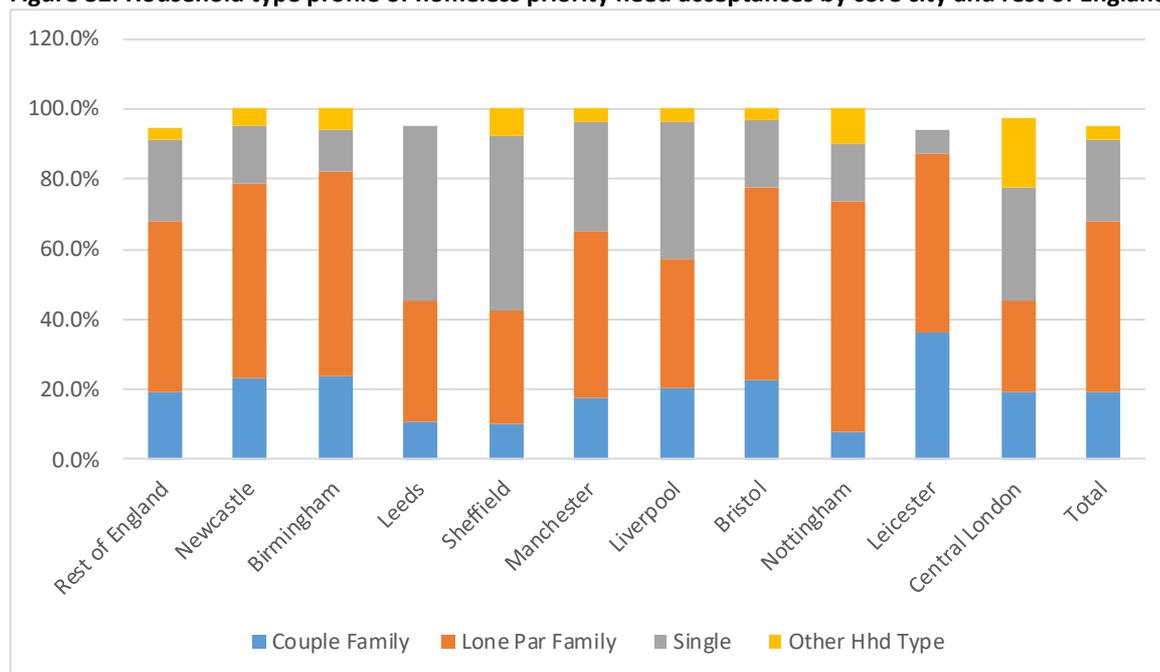
New data being collected under H-CLIC will further enhance our understanding of the make-up of the new wider statutory homeless population. Of particular value will be data from the new H-CLIC variable on applicants' support needs. At the moment, this is only released at national and regional level, but will in time provide highly significant and potentially impactful local level data too. Although support needs have been recorded for some time on the parallel Scottish HL1 system, first impressions of the new H-CLIC data are that it is more thorough in recording these. The headline finding from Q2 2018 is that 48% of all homeless applicants nationally have support needs, with many of that group having more than one such need. Just over a fifth of all applicants have a history of mental health problems, 14% have a physical health condition or disability, around 10% are at risk of or experiencing domestic abuse, 7.5% have an offending history, 4-5% report drug/alcohol dependency issues, 7% report a history of repeat homelessness and nearly 6% one of rough sleeping, and 6% are young persons requiring support to manage independently. This evidence provides reinforcement for messages about the importance of SMD issues and awareness, discussed in chapter three and also anticipates some of the gaps in Newcastle service provision identified in chapter seven, particularly concerning mental ill-health.

Rough sleeping

Rough sleeping is the most extreme form of homelessness, and one which receives much media, charitable and public attention. However, although there is an official system of collating local

estimates based on street counts on particular nights or other methods, these estimates are of dubious completeness or consistency (as discussed further below). The collated figures are of some value for monitoring trends, at least at national and perhaps at regional level, but should be treated with great caution in terms of local comparisons. With these provisos, we report the trends since 2010 in Figure 32.

Figure 33: Rough Sleeper Nightly count/estimate by Core City and Rest of England (percent of households)
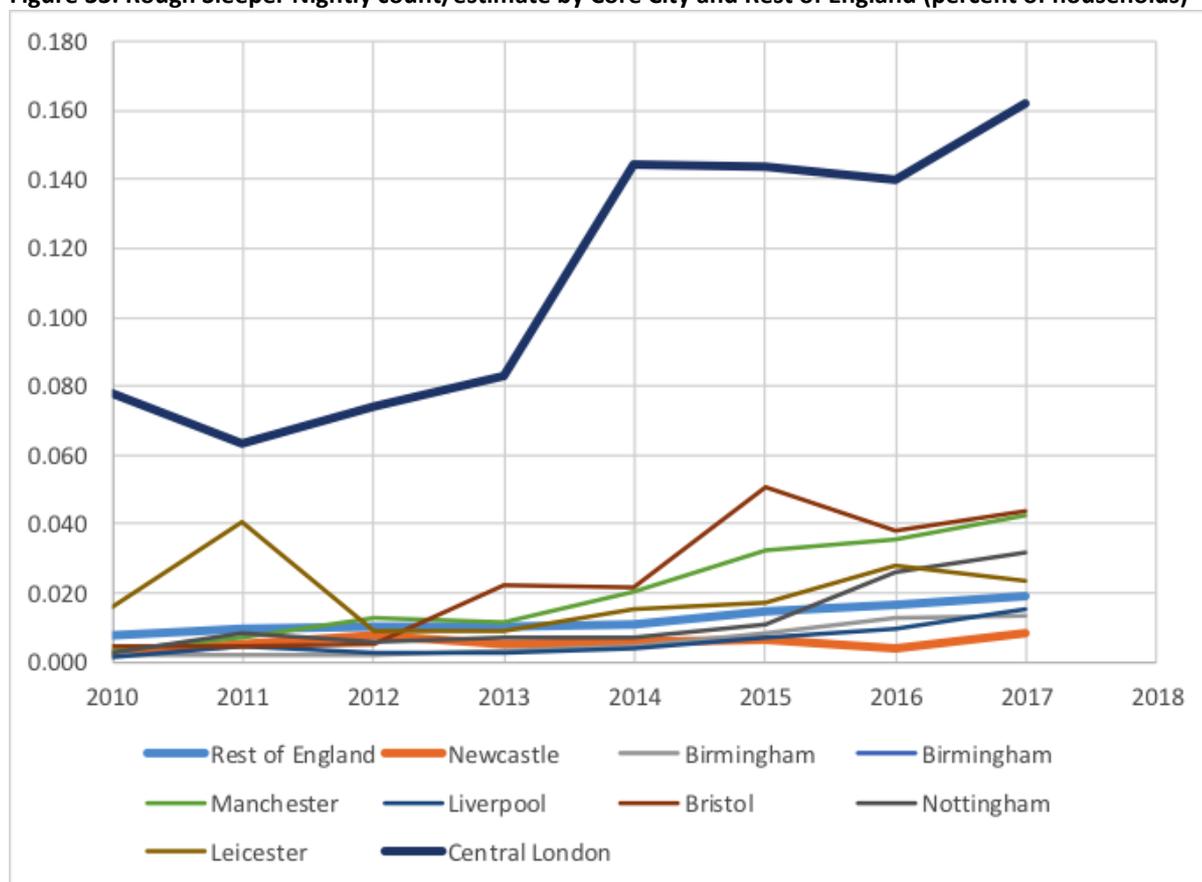
Central London radically stands out from other core cities in terms of the rate of households recorded rough sleeping, and the pace of increase. Newcastle, along with Sheffield and Leeds[40], have the lowest rates, and these have not increased since 2012. The strongest increases for core cities outside of London were in Manchester and Bristol. We would argue that these variations reflect in part differences in housing market pressure and limits on social housing supply, as well as underlying factors of poverty, crime, etc. (see chapter three and below).

Drilling down into the detail in Newcastle, street counts record numbers rough sleeping in the single figures in the city – on average 4-6 per night based on the most recent figures, with around 254 individuals found sleeping rough during 2017/18 (around the same as in 2016/17, NCC, 2019b, 2018c). The largest group among those found sleeping rough across the year (2017/18) are 'stock' i.e. people who were also seen sleeping rough in the previous year (47%), followed by new rough sleepers ('flow'), making up (42%) and the remaining 11% 'returners' i.e. previously seen sleeping rough, but not in the immediately prior year. This distribution is distinct from that seen in London, for example, where the highest proportion of rough sleepers are new to the city.

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[40] Not shown in Figure 33 for clarity – the figure instead focuses on illustrating the range of variation in rates across the core cities.

Supporting quantitative and qualitative data presented in chapter three, this data does indicate that despite comparatively very low levels of rough sleeping in Newcastle, there is a group of multiply excluded individuals who spend time cycling between hostels, rough sleeping and likely other temporary living situations over at least a several year period (NCC, 2018c, NCC, 2018b). A 2018 NCC analysis of Gateway client records system data tell us more about this group, and in particular segments the population of those presenting in need of housing/homelessness support (including found rough sleeping and in touch with the assertive outreach team) into the following groups:

- **Short-Term Transitionally Homeless**: individuals who have had 1 episode of homelessness for a period of no more than 9 months (segment 1);
- **Medium-Term Transitionally Homeless**: individuals who have had 1 episode of homelessness for a period of between 9 months and 2 years (segment 2);
- **Episodically Homeless**: individuals who have had 2+ episodes of homelessness of less than 2 years cumulatively (segment 3);
- **Chronically Homeless**: individuals who have had 1+ episodes of homelessness of between 2 and 4 years cumulatively (segment 4);
- **Chronic+ Homeless**: individuals who have had 1+ episodes of homelessness lasting more that 4 years (segment 5).

Figure 34: Segmentation of the Newcastle Homeless population (2010-2018 combined data)
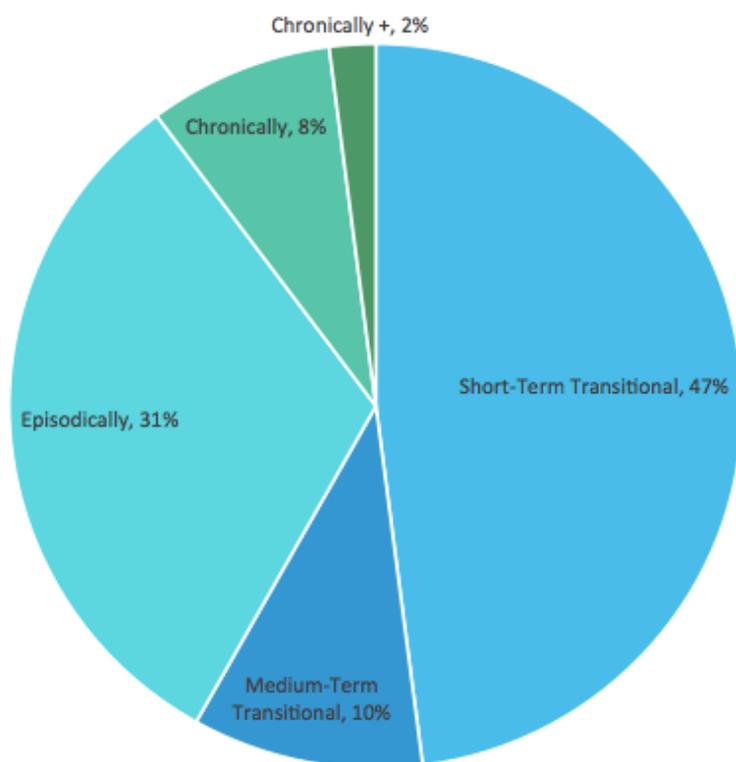
As can be seen from Figure 34, using combined data from 2010-18, the largest groups by a considerable margin are the short term transitionally homeless (47%) and the episodically homeless (31%), though it should be noted that the methodology and data deployed are likely to under-represent the needs of the homeless population and there are issues of missing data (NCC, 2018b). Around 1 in 10 of those recorded on the Gateway over this 8 year period were chronically homeless,

and have been 'in the system' for 2 years or more. This group have an older age profile than the un-segmented homeless population and are more likely to be male. The segmentation analysis confirms the issue of 'negative discharges' from services and accommodation in the city (for rent arrears, disruptive behaviour and violence for instance) across *all* segments, and churn between multiple services at intensifying levels as you move from segment 1-5. Taking a snapshot of the same data covering only people in accommodation at one point in time (February 2018), showed – as would be expected – a smaller proportion of individuals in the short and medium-term, and episodically homeless groups, with 48% of those recorded in the system at this point chronically homeless (NCC, 2018b). Analysis found higher costs associated with segments 4 and 5 (the chronically homeless groups): though making up only 11% of the population over a five year time period, this group comprised 42% of the costs over that period.

This analysis further confirms that in Newcastle there is a chronically homeless group of people experiencing various forms of homelessness for extended periods and with significant cost implications, as well as profoundly important implications for the health and wellbeing of those impacted (see also chapter four and Bramley et al, 2015). From the analysis presented in chapter four, it would appear that this group has not been the major focus of service development and provision in the homelessness arena, despite the recent Street Zero initiative, with greater emphasis placed on early intervention.

Core homelessness

In a parallel research project for the homelessness charity Crisis, Bramley (2016 and forthcoming) has developed the concept of 'core homelessness', which focuses on people who are in the most extreme homeless situations. This encompasses much more of the single homeless population traditionally inadequately reflected in statutory homelessness statistics, including people who are rough sleeping or in 'quasi rough sleeping situations (sleeping in cars, tents, or on public transport); squatting and occupation of non-residential buildings; staying in hostels, refuges and shelters; unsuitable TA (e.g. B&B, non-self-contained, a proportion of out of area placements); and 'sofa-surfing', i.e. staying with non-family, on a short-term basis, in overcrowded conditions.

While we regard this set of categories, which together constitute core homelessness, as a coherent and defensible way of defining the concept[41], there are significant limitations in the data sources available and methods used to routinely record some of these elements of homelessness. To overcome these the research has had to draw on and 'triangulate' a range of different sources (including retrospective and service-user surveys) to produce estimates, which rely in part on assumptions, as well as hard data. Here we draw on a recent update of the original core homelessness estimates to show the position in Newcastle and other comparable core cities and city-regions. Figure 35 shows the recent estimate of numbers for Newcastle and its adjacent Housing Market Area and the overall city region total.

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[41] This definition is consistent with wider international approaches (Busch-Geertsema et al, 2016). It also has practical advantages in avoiding double-counting and conceptual problems in mixing stock and flow measures.

Figure 35: Core Homelessness Component Estimates for Newcastle and its Wider Housing Market Area, 2017
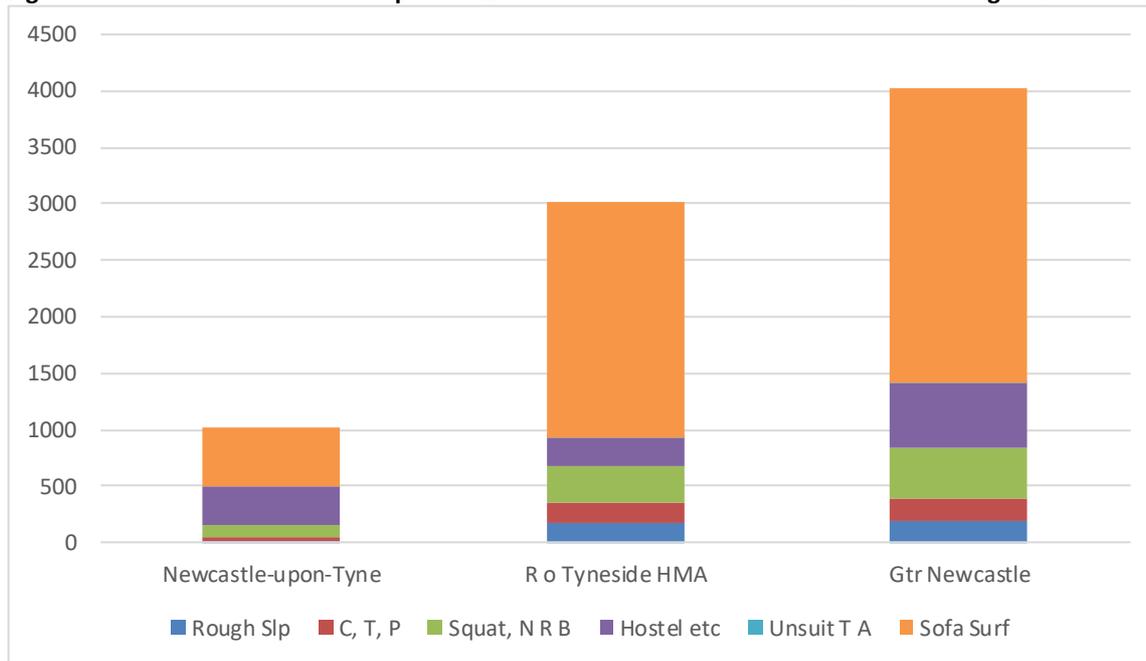
	Rough Sleeping	Cars, tents and public transport	Squat, Non-Residential Building	Hostel etc[1]	Unsuit TA[2]	Sofa Surf	Total
Newcastle-upon-Tyne	19	19	120	334	0	521	1012
R o Tyneside HMA	172	172	340	238	8	2,087	3018
Greater Newcastle	191	191	460	572	8	2,608	4,030

Source: authors estimates – updated Crisis Core Homelessness estimates, Dec 2017. Notes: (1) Hostels which cater to homeless people, including refuges and shelters. Not including long-term supported accommodation (2) Unsuitable TA includes Bed and Breakfast accommodation, non-self-contained nightly lets and out of area placements.

Figure 36: Core Homelessness estimates for selected core cities and their wider Housing Market Areas in 2011, 2015 and 2017 (number of households).
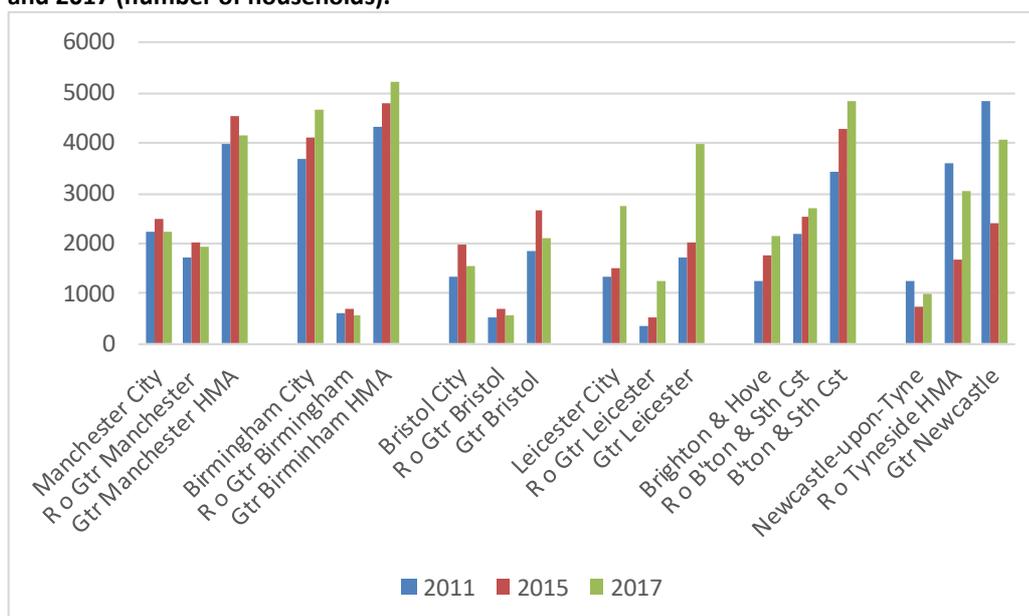
There are six components of core homelessness, four of which are estimated by various direct and indirect methods, and two of which are simply pro rata mark-ups on other elements (see Appendix). At the local level these estimates should be regarded as indicative, not definitive, and would normally be published in rounded form. With these points in mind, Newcastle is notable for having relatively low total numbers of core homeless, compared with other comparable core cities such as Manchester, Birmingham, Bristol, Leicester and Brighton (see figure 36). However, it is also noteworthy that the surrounding HMA appears to have substantially higher numbers. Brighton and the South Coast is really the only comparator where a similar, if less extreme, situation pertains. While this does reflect the population size of the wider HMA area, it also reflects the relative poverty of these surrounding areas (documented in chapter three) and possibly some differences in policies and practices around homeless prevention and service provision (for example, less proactive and comprehensive homelessness prevention services).

Newcastle City is notable for having very low amounts of rough sleeping, as already identified, and currently no unsuitable forms of Temporary Accommodation as defined here (Bed and Breakfast accommodation, non-self-contained nightly lets and out of area placements), which must be regarded as a good achievement. There is a moderate scale of hostel accommodation, in fact rather more than in the adjacent authorities in part owing to local decisions to protect these services in Newcastle, but still considerably less than in several comparable core cities. That leaves sofa surfing as the largest element of core homelessness in Newcastle. It is not that the scale of this is excessive for a city of this size, but it is a significant element as in most areas. Indeed, the scale of sofa surfing in the adjacent districts of the HMA is quite large (over 2,000).

Homelessness Forecasts and Projections
In developing an approach to making forward projections of homelessness for Crisis, in order to develop a better understanding of what policy and contextual factors would influence future homelessness numbers, a number of statistical forecasting models were developed or adapted. These are brought together in the framework of a general 'Sub-regional housing market model' developed over a number of years to analyse issues relating to planning, housing supply, housing need and poverty (Bramley & Watkins 2016, Bramley et al, 2016). It is useful to note here some of the key factors which those models identify as significant in influencing variations in levels of homelessness in its different forms.

Rough sleeping: despite difficulties with measuring this phenomenon, some models were developed using retrospective experience data in the Poverty and Social Exclusion Survey (and the Scottish Household Survey). This indicates that the risks of experiencing rough sleeping are associated with age (being under 25), gender (being male), being a single person household, current and past poverty, crime rates and/or criminal record, unemployment, in-migration and unsuitable TA. This would suggest that efforts to prevent rough sleeping can usefully focus on reducing poverty (see also Bramley and Fitzpatrick, 2018), increasing employment, minimising the use of unsuitable forms of temporary/supported accommodation, and minimising links between engagement with the criminal justice system and homelessness (e.g. improving prison discharge). It is important to highlight that some of the key levers for influencing these things (e.g. the scope and generosity of the social security system) lie with central, not local government, albeit that some discretionary forms of welfare support (Local Welfare Assistance, Discretionary Housing Payments) now lie at the local level.

Hostels: it is assumed that the number of people staying in hostels is largely supply-determined, given funding constraints on provider organisations. Minimising this form of homelessness in Newcastle would require moving towards a rapid rehousing model complemented by floating support for those who need it (and Housing First provision for those with the most complex needs). There is recognition of the need for such a transition in the city, albeit that clear steps in this direction have not yet been taken.

Sofa Surfing: Our Crisis work on *Homeless Projections* suggests that this is numerically the largest group of 'core homeless' people, and that seems to be particularly the case in Newcastle/Tyneside. This can be defined and measured, probably incompletely, using current surveys such as the Survey of English Housing, or Understanding Society, or can be identified from retrospective questions as the Poverty and Social Exclusion and Scottish Household Surveys (and this year for the first time in EU-SILC). Bramley et al's (2018) report for the Office for National Statistics and Joseph Rowntree Foundation highlights possibly improved ways of measuring this important group. Models developed in the projections study utilised quite a range of variables found to be associated with such experiences, including demographics (age, migrancy, household types), poverty (income, financial difficulties, past poverty, unemployment, job growth/decline), housing (tenure, crowding, social housing supply), criminal record, and institutional accommodation including mental health related and temporary accommodation. Once again, policies aiming to reduce poverty and increase employment in Newcastle provide a key means of reducing this form of core homelessness in the city. Efforts to prevent criminal activity and manage transitions out of institutions (including forms of homeless accommodation and mental health facilities) would also be predicted to play an important role.

Homeless acceptances: Models to predict this were developed based on local authority P1E data over a run of years, building on similar work in the 2010 study *Estimating Housing Need.* These were useful for then helping to predict total and 'unsuitable' temporary accommodation use. The acceptances model included factors relating to migration, household types, ethnicity, earnings/low income, qualifications, disability and the local extent of welfare cuts, house prices and social rented supply, crime rates, various institutional populations including hostels and mental health hospitals, and some measures of prevention activity (which tend to reduce acceptances). Total TA and unsuitable TA numbers tends to follow from acceptances, but is also influenced by the supply of social lettings, private rent levels, hostel capacity, and some area typology categories (London, major cities). The discrepancy between current market rent levels and the frozen level of LHA was particularly significant here (but mainly affecting London and the South). These models would tend to predict lower levels of acceptances in Newcastle than in other core cities because of the lower house prices and private rents, generous social rented supply situation, and active prevention activity. These features of the area have helped compensate for the very significant level of local authority budgets cuts and the impact of welfare cuts and reforms in the city.

The modelling work also extended to cover a range of forms of 'wider homelessness', which we would characterise as groups of people in situations which put them at tangible risk of becoming homeless (core or statutory) in the near future. Major groups here include: concealed households; sharing households; private renters at risk of exiting from their current accommodation and in difficulty finding a suitable replacement; people stuck in temporary accommodation, including 'unsupported' TA; prisoners and mental health in-patients expecting to be discharged; and people living in non-permanent accommodation like caravans or boats. Reasonable statistical models have been

developed to predict the first three groups here. These models are similar to and overlap with models used to predict the incidence of unmet housing needs/shortfalls within the overall household population. Common themes in these models are demographic factors (younger ages, single person/adult households, poverty, rental sector background and rent/affordability levels). It would be possible to draw out from the existing forecasts, or updated versions when available, those factors, which seem to be more or less important in driving levels and trends in homelessness affecting Newcastle.

Conclusion

Based on the multiple measures considered in this chapter, Newcastle has low levels of homelessness compared to other core cities and (unusually) compared to its surrounding Housing Market Area. In particular, Newcastle records very low levels of homelessness acceptances, households in TA and levels of street homelessness, and no use of unsuitable TA like Bed and Breakfast accommodation. This is in spite of the challenging context for homelessness prevention described in chapter three, with Newcastle among the cities worst effected by local government budget cuts and welfare reform, and having (in common with some other core cities) higher levels of severe and multiple disadvantage and destitution than other cities. The most likely combined explanations for this are Newcastle's relatively positive housing market context (lower private rent levels, higher social lettings), and very strong emphasis on – and network of services for – homelessness prevention. Also relevant is that Newcastle find a higher proportion of applicants to be non-priority need and not homeless than elsewhere, which is likely to reflect the impact of early prevention work (bringing higher numbers of households into the statutory system, not all of whom will be owed the 'full rehousing duty') and/or local variations in interpretation of the priority need test. The impacts of this on households' wellbeing are not clear, especially given the broader and proactive level of non-statutory preventative and supportive interventions provided in Newcastle. It is also worth noting that in common with other core cities, hidden forms of homelessness like sofa surfing and staying with friends/family, appear to be a sizeable issue in Newcastle, as reflected in 'core homelessness' estimates and in figures on people's accommodation status at the time of application. This presents both avenues, and challenges, for future efforts to increase and improve homelessness prevention efforts.

Trends in both statutory homelessness and rough sleeping in Newcastle appear to be broadly stable, in stark contrast to trends overall across England and in particular in London and the South. This reflects a broader regional story linked primarily to housing market context, but no doubt aided by the city's preventative focus. Interestingly, Newcastle has seen an uptick in homeless acceptances in most recent year in stark contrast to other core cities who have seen a decline. Though caution should be taken in reading too much into a one year change, this wider decline has been linked to local authorities 'gearing up' for the Homelessness Reduction Act, and it may be that scope to make short term gains in this manner was minimal given the pre-existing heavy emphasis on prevention in Newcastle. It may also indicate that the gains possible given Newcastle's existing approach to homelessness prevention in the current context are reaching their limit, and this theme is explored further in chapter seven.

The various statutory and survey based data sources deployed in this chapter also tell a story about the key triggers of homelessness in Newcastle. In common with the rest of the country, the ending of private tenancies is a primary driver of statutory homelessness, along with violent relationship breakdown and family exclusions. Early data indicate a different balance of triggers affecting the

wider groups owed prevention and relief duties under the Homelessness Reduction Act. The ending of private tenancies and family exclusions remain key, but non-violent relationship breakdown plays a more prominent role and eviction from supported housing also seems to be important. There is also some suggestion that leaving student accommodation and returning from abroad are a relevant part of this picture of homelessness triggers. Data on accommodation type at the time of application under the HRA show that a greater number of households presenting having been staying with friends and family than come from the private or social rented sector, underlining the importance of finding modes of intervention targeting this group. Taken together this evidence on the triggers and circumstances of homelessness in Newcastle point to a series of priority areas for the development (or in some cases further development of) preventative interventions, specifically those targeting: at risk PRS tenants, those at risk of or experiencing domestic abuse and violence, those staying precariously or unsustainable with friends of family, and potentially (subject to future HRA data) students with limited move on options.

We have also used this mix of data sources to explore the profile of Newcastle's homeless population. Key messages include that as in the rest of the country, Black and Minority Ethnic are significantly over-represented among those accepted as statutorily homeless, likely reflecting more general drivers of homelessness (i.e. poverty) disproportionately impacting this group, and combining with the challenges of recent migration for some households. We have also seen that though absolute numbers and rates of rough sleeping in Newcastle are low, there are a subgroup of homeless individuals in the city who appear to be 'stuck in the system', experiencing various forms of core homelessness over a long-time period and cycling between rough sleeping and supported accommodation. Though small in terms of absolute numbers, as Newcastle City Council recognise, this group is the most visible section of the homeless population and associated with highest costs to the public pursue, in addition of course to the human impacts of this form of severe and enduring disadvantage. Relevant here is that in chapter three we have seen that Newcastle has among the highest rates of severe and multiple disadvantage among the core cities. We suggest that, despite recent developments in relation to the Street Zero initiative, this group might legitimately be the focus of future homelessness prevention service development, particularly concerning 'exclusions criteria' (whether formal or informal) limiting access to support via street outreach and in relation to exclusions from and abandonment of crisis and supported accommodation placements.

Finally, this chapter has placed this consideration of homelessness in Newcastle in the context of wider forecasting and projections work that has highlighted the key drivers of homelessness trends in England. This work highlights the fundamental role of poverty reduction in preventing homelessness, as well as making links between homelessness risk and unemployment, crime rates, and institutional discharge. Some of these 'levers' are subject to local manipulation and indeed, as chapter four has illustrated, are being directly targeted to seek to prevent homelessness early and proactively. It should also be acknowledged, however, that many of the primary influences on these levers lie with Central Government who has for the last decade or so taken a 'light touch' approach to steering local authority efforts on homelessness combined with reforms to the welfare system and local government finance that are widely acknowledged to be pushing homelessness risk in the wrong direction. In the next two chapters, qualitative data gathered from first, those with direct experiences of preventative interventions, and second, key informants and frontline workers, is used to further explore and interrogate the strengths and weaknesses of prevention efforts in the city and how they might be developed and improved in the future.

6. Evaluating homelessness prevention in Newcastle: service user perspectives

This chapter turns to the data gathered in 17 interviews with a total of 18 individuals with recent experience of homelessness or being at risk of homelessness in Newcastle. As described in chapter two, participants were accessed via five different services to ensure that a range of experiences were captured. These were: the Housing Advice Centre, the Homelessness Prevention Trailblazer multidisciplinary team, Cherry Tree View temporary accommodation and preventative outreach services, Your Homes Newcastle advice and support services, and a supported accommodation provider. This sampling approach sought to enable us to gather insights into the experiences of households spanning the spectrum of being at early risk of homelessness, to those experiencing it currently/recently, and who have engaged with the variety of preventative interventions deployed in the city. Inevitably, deploying a qualitative methodology and small sample, the experiences of these 18 individuals cannot be taken as in any way representative of the experiences of Newcastle residents at risk of or experiencing homelessness. It is rather intended that they provide an indication of how a quite diverse group of households have ended up facing homelessness or risk of homelessness, and provide some insights into their experiences of services in the city to complement other aspects of the study. The findings from these interviews are discussed under the following key themes: current and recent housing circumstances; income and expenditure; and experiences of services.

Current and recent housing circumstances

Of the 18 individuals we spoke to, nine were residing in social housing at the time of interview, three in self-contained temporary accommodation (including one couple interviewed together), three in young people's supported accommodation, and three in the private rented sector. As would be expected given our sampling strategy, there had been considerable recent flux in the housing circumstances of most of the sample, in particular linked to eviction from the private rented sector, the breakdown/ending of sofa surfing arrangements, and participants finding accommodation following time sleeping rough.

Those living in the social rented sector at the time of the interview (and primarily in council housing specifically) were comfortable with where they lived and liked the area. All of those we spoke to in this category *felt* that their tenancy was affordable. This was despite the fact that almost all were required to make up payments of rent themselves because their Housing Benefit or Universal Credit did not cover their rental costs, sometimes due to the benefit cap or bedroom tax. A number of the social tenants we spoke to also had rent arrears because of benefit issues. This young male describes his arrears, and also explains (somewhat paradoxically) that he still feels that his property is affordable:

> "it's really, really affordable. I have got rent arrears to pay them for, which is quite a bit. I've got, like, £800 rent arrears, but I pay that off monthly. On top of my rent I pay £25 of rent arrears... that's got something to do with benefits and stuff like that. They've been really okay with it. I had one little instance where they were a bit stern with me, but apart from that, it's all been absolutely great" (single male, under 25, social tenant)

This perception of affordability might be explained by a number of factors, including knowledge of higher private sector rent levels, the forbearance and tolerant orientation to arrears taken by Your Homes Newcastle, and the tenants' security of tenure (potentially meaning that having arrears was less stressful than in a private tenancy). While tolerating these arrears is far from ideal from an organisational perspective, we can clearly see in this quote that the risk of homelessness appears to have been minimised and the stress of low income, housing affordability issues and homelessness risk minimised for the tenant. It is worth noting that the landlords' forbearance did appear to be linked to and dependent upon the tenants continuing engagement and efforts to reduce those arrears.

The experiences of private renters in the sample were less positive. In common with social tenants, they also had to top up their Housing Benefit/Universal Credit to cover the rent. One tenant described 'just' getting by, needing to top up benefits by a considerable sum weekly from his own income replacement benefit: *"It's cheaper than a lot of flats around this area… it's affordable and I get by, just, yes, I get by… [I make my rent by] about £25 a week"* (single male, late 40s, private tenant). What was important to this participant was that he was in an area he was familiar with and the property was of a fair standard. For another private tenant, who faced a smaller 'top up' of £5 per week, the key issue concerned the property's state of repair, which was so bad she described her and her eight year old Grandson's time living their as *"the worst two years of my life, I swear. It's awful"* (single parent, early 50s, private tenant). She explained:

> "My bairn's sleeping on the settee at the moment because the bedroom got flooded. It went right through his bed to the floor. The bed's had to be thrown out; all his… Build-A-Bears have gone. It absolutely stinks. It took me ages to get in touch with him [landlord], and he only came because eventually the environmental health came… I had no cooker for two years because he wouldn't come out and give us a gas pipe 'till I'd reported it. Then eventually the other week he put one in." (single parent, early 50s, private tenant)

Although this tenant reported having always paid her rent on time, these issues had prompted her landlord to serve her with a notice to quit, something the tenant saw this as a retaliatory eviction: *"When you fight back and you start reporting them, it's then they start just giving you a hard time… they sent me an eviction letter because I reported them to the council"*. The issue had not yet been resolved at the time of interview.

Participants who were staying or had stayed in self-contained single site temporary accommodation in the city had relatively positive experiences of the quality of that accommodation, though described feelings of being 'in limbo', and a keenness, even anxiety, to move on to a more stable and settled position. One participant who had stayed in Cherry Tree View explained that she *"just couldn't focus"* (single female, early 50s, social tenant) during that time. She felt slightly better in her current council tenancy, though still unsettled given enduring challenges in relation to her benefits. Another single parent participant was staying in self-contained TA awaiting rehousing. She was positive about the quality and suitability of the accommodation. While it was away from the children's schools, travel expenses to enable them to attend were covered by the local authority. Nevertheless, this participant was 'desperate' to move on, but considerable anxiety surrounded where she would be rehoused. She was particularly concerned that she would not have much choice about the location of the new home and be forced to accept an offer she wasn't happy with. A couple who participated in the study were relatively positive about their experiences in self-contained TA and the support they had received

while there to sort their financial circumstances, and in particular to begin to clear high levels of previous arrears on a former council tenancy. They had, however, been in TA for a fairly long period (several months), and unable to bid for rehousing, explaining that the council were not prepared to 'activate' them *"until they were happy with… payments… made back to [the] arrears"*.

The three young people interviewed who were currently living in supported accommodation had contrasting views about their accommodation, largely satisfied with the nature of the accommodation itself but disagreeing about the value of the emphasis on them gaining life skills (around cooking and budgeting, for instance) and becoming 'tenancy ready' before they were rehoused. While two described this structure and support as valuable and giving them confidence to move on (*"They've been really good… help[ing] us with obviously things I didn't know before I moved in here. They've helped us a lot"*, single female, under 25, supported accommodation), the other young person took the opposite view seeing the support as obstructive and delaying his progress in moving on to permanent housing:

> "I asked them if I can move into my own flat, if I paid, because I'm on the housing [list] anyway. They said, 'Well, not really,' because you need a reference off them. So basically, [I'm] tied down in here until I do the work [getting tenancy ready] which I don't really want to do, because I've never had to [do that kind of thing] and I don't know many people who have to do that work." (single male, under 25, supported accommodation)

Though we understand that 'out of area' placements are only very rarely used in Newcastle, due to their very specific circumstances, two participants in this study were housed outside of Newcastle in areas they were not happy to be living in. One was accommodated in social housing via a 'direct let', a mechanism used to enable households to access social housing where there either isn't sufficient time to go through the choice-based lettings system or where the household wouldn't qualify for social housing by the usual means. While this participant described the area as *"weird"* and had some issues with a neighbour, they were adapting to the new area. The primary disadvantage of moving was that links with a supportive adviser at the Housing Advice Centre had been broken because the new accommodation was out of the catchment area for that service. The second individual was residing in a private tenancy in a part of the region they didn't want to be in. The tenancy had been accessed the Housing Advice Centre's prevention service given the unusually restricted options available to the household in question, not least because he owns a dog. While in both cases there were particular reasons for the household accessing the accommodation in question, their dissatisfaction raises questions about tenancy sustainability, in particular for the private tenant:

> "I'm not happy at all. I've seen the advisers and that, I'm not happy… it's too far away … and I've got a really bad neighbour upstairs, and all… I'm trying to get back on the council again, trying to get into [particular part of Newcastle]… It's a bit closer for me, you know what I mean? For my family. Because it's costing me £5 a day to get over here from town… I don't like it. I don't like the whole area, I don't like the flat I'm at now… I'm looking to move out." (single male, 50s, private tenant)

The sub-sample accessed via the multidisciplinary team were unique in their housing stability prior to interview, reflecting the early intervention approach being pursued by the team and providing some limited evidence of its success (see also NCC, 2018f).

Financial situation

All the interviewees were receiving benefits at the time of the interview, with only two in work but still claiming either Housing Benefit or Universal Credit for housing costs. Eleven of the participating households were claiming Universal Credit as an income replacement benefit, three Income Support and Child Tax Credit (families), two Employment Support Allowance, and one Jobseekers Allowance. Four of the interviewees also received some element of Personal Independence Payment (PIP). All three of the households receiving Income Support and Child Tax Credit were single parents and had been affected by the benefit cap once it was reduced in 2016 and two of these were also affected by the two-child limit[42]. These families had, however, been supported with the loss of income through Discretionary Housing Payment (see below).

A significant proportion of the sample described their income from benefits as so low that it did not see them through until their next payment. Only two felt able to manage on the money they received, with one of these explaining that this was only because they received their benefit fortnightly rather than monthly. Five of the seventeen households we spoke to were having third party deductions taken from their benefit payments before they received the residual amount. These participants reported being left with £40 to £60 per week to pay all other household bills, and cover food and transport costs. This participant, the primary carer for her grandson, explains:

> "Well, the social [DWP] takes money off me, oh, God, for different things like social loans. They've just started taking money off for water rates, I think…it comes to about £40 or £50 all together what they take… it's hard because like everything has to be paid a month – like I've got to pay [grandson's] breakfast club a month ahead… BrightHouse has been banging on the phone because I didn't have enough money to pay them this month… because I cannot walk properly, I'm having to pay £100 a month for my bus pass. That's killing me at the moment, but without that bus pass I wouldn't be able to get out of the house." (single parent, early 50s, private tenant)

A number of interviewees stated they had no money left for either food or fuel and often self-disconnected from their fuel supply (stopped adding money to their meter) as they had no money to do so. One participant described going to the library where it was always warm so she could leave the heating off and help make it last till her next payment date. This participant described a similar struggle, also explaining the impact it had on his capacity to seek work (due to the cost of travel, for instance):

> "I'm getting like £200, I get £200 a month… off the dole, and they expect me to live off that. I can't live off that, because I'm paying electric, gas, food and then they want us [me] to go and look for jobs. How can I do that out of £50? It's totally impossible. With Council Tax there, with water rates… I can't really afford to pay them any of them to be honest" (single male, early 50s, private tenant)

He also explained that he was relieved DWP had agreed to have his rent paid directly to his landlord because otherwise he would likely use it for his other commitments. Another interviewee reported going without gas for the heating to try and cover other bills and even then, sometimes running out of food, requiring a referral to a foodbank of food pack via other charities:

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[42] In 2015, only around 650 households in the North East region were impacted by the benefit cap, 57% of which were single parents. In 2018, following the lowering of the cap, almost 2.500 households were impacted, three quarters of whom were single parents. See Blenkinsopp and Stephens (2019).

"I've had deductions… for court fines, like Council Tax… I've totally forgot what else comes out my [money]… the gas I leave sometimes… I get a bit sick, but it has to do, doesn't it?… [I've gone] a week without… Sometimes I run out of food … I've had a food bank [voucher] I've had like [a food pack from another charity] as well, but it's not really often that you get [that] or [use a] food bank." (single female, early 20s, social tenant)

Being supported by friends, family and charities was common. Crucially, this was not because of any crisis, or change in circumstance that necessitated seeking help, but rather living on a permanently low income which meant people's options were severely reduced and people were unable to pay essential costs themselves, as described by this interviewee:

"It's about £50 they're taking off every month [for third party deductions etc.]. Forty-odd pounds in loans, and then obviously what I'm left with is £244 a month. It's not a lot when you think about it, when you've got to pay [for the] TV licence… gas and electric, shopping. You think, I've got nothing left… [I'm] scrimping and scraping on the money I'm getting, what can I do?" (single female, early 50s, social tenant)

A further issue raised by interviewees was their ability to furnish a property themselves out of this low income, particularly if it was a new social rented property, as these are generally let unfurnished. This young male with shared custody of his daughter explained that while he (unlike the participants above) did in fact manage to save a very small amount each month, this still meant waiting five months to have enough for a cooker and even longer for other basics like a sofa, freezer and even bed:

"I haven't got a freezer. I've only got this little fridge that I can put a little bottle of milk in or so on… I haven't got much… I'm trying to save a little bit but I'm only saving, I save £10 to £15 a month at very most and even a second-hand cooker, you're talking £85 and so on. Again, it's going to take me five months to save up for a cooker, let alone a settee, a bed and everything like that." (single parent, male, late twenties, social tenant)

In contexts like these, participants who had had a change of circumstance or indeed a crisis situation were very quickly thrown into chaos because of the underlying lack of money. Situations like having their benefits sanctioned or changing from one benefit to another and going long periods without money could spiral quickly, including leading to homelessness or the very high risk of it. For one single parent, changing jobs and having incorrect information held with DWP (that she had multiple jobs and thus a higher income than she in fact was) led to a spiral in financial circumstances and swift build up of arrears which meant the interviewee was issued with an eviction notice.

Participants with young children described being keen to work but having difficulty accessing adequate and affordable child care:

"Universal Credits were kicking in, so I had to go through that instead of Income Support. At this point, I was also looking for jobs but then I wouldn't have been able to afford childcare… He [son] was still too young, so we didn't get any help with his childcare fees. His dad didn't really want to help [either]" (single parent, female, mid 20s, social tenant)

This participant, with a stable history of work until recently, faced similar issues, just failing to qualify for free childcare for her almost two year old:

> "My daughter is two, believe it or not, on [date in the near future]. When they're two you're entitled to 15 hours free childcare, the term starts on 23rd April, so she misses it because the term goes by that day… At the minute I can't really look for work because obviously I've got her, but she can start in September and you can pay the extra money to get it up to 30 hours" (single parent, female, early 30s, social tenant)

For a small number of people, the primary issues placing them at risk of homelessness were not these systemic challenges (entitlement to a very low level of benefits, high deductions, lack of access to affordable childcare), but a lack of awareness about the help to which they were in fact entitled. This couple were unaware they'd be entitled to any help with their housing costs given receipt of a pension, leading to a dramatic build up of arrears and eviction from their private tenancy:

> "because I've got my pension. I didn't realise Universal Credit could help me… so when I started to get arrears because I was only on my pension and not working, it didn't cover it [rent]… [in the end] we both got Universal Credit [but] by this point… the rent arrears had already occurred… [I thought wrongly] I've got my pension… and they will probably class it as a job, because I had an income. I never tried all these years" (couple, early 50s, temporary accommodation)

The outcome of this lack of knowledge for this household was catastrophic as they had recently been evicted from a private rented sector property due to rent arrears.

Interestingly, the three young people we spoke to currently residing in supported accommodation showed less signs of immediate financial distress than those living independently in the private or social rented sector, perhaps reflecting that the majority of their utility costs were included in their rental charge, rather than having to come out of their residual income. The same could also be said of the two households currently staying in temporary self-contained accommodation, with their financial concerns largely related to past debts or their likely financial situation when rehoused. For example, a single parent we spoke to knew that she would be effected by the benefit cap when in independent housing, but was unsure how this would effect her financially (she planned to seek work once rehoused and thus potentially escape the impact of the cap). It is also worth noting that none of the five participants we spoke to in supported or temporary accommodation were currently in employment.

Experience of services

Participants we spoke to had received a wide range support from services in the city spanning the range of interventions described in chapter 4. This included access to temporary/supported housing, help accessing social or privately rented housing, welfare rights advice to ensure receipt of appropriate benefits, debt advice to manage e.g. rent arrears, access to Discretionary Housing Payments, help securing furniture, and crisis help with food or fuel costs. The following sections pull out key messages in relation to what worked well for these households and areas where scope for improvement is indicated.

What worked?

From the perspective of those we spoke to, some key components of service responses emerged as particularly valued and/or effective. First, it was very clear that in a number of cases, services had

been able to offer substantial financial help to households, and resolve – or at least substantially ameliorate – issues that were putting at them at very high risk of homelessness. In this case, a backdated benefit claim and a large Discretionary Housing Payment was awarded to address substantial arrears relating to a benefit issue and a shortfall in housing support costs going forward:

> "I talked [Cherry Tree View preventative outreach worker] through my full situation and straightaway got absolutely everything sorted out. I had no housing benefit for three months, which I wasn't aware of. I was working full-time just one job and they had us [me] down with my old job, so they had us [me] as having three jobs in the end… he ended up getting a lot of money, over £1,000, backdated on to my rent. He put in a DHP and got a lot of money off that as well" (single parent, female, early 30s, social tenant)

In this case, a man with significant mental health issues had received assistance applying for PIP, thus increasing his income, combined with help managing existing debts. These interventions had clearly made an enormous difference to the individual's wellbeing and security in his tenancy, leaving him extremely positive about the service he'd received from the multidisciplinary team:

> "[Name of MDT worker] helped me with applying for PIP, which I managed to get. So anything I need like that I would see her and she's an absolutely amazing woman, because we had a good long chat as well and what's the other one called, [Name], she helped us with some of the debts I had, put us on the right track and I'm sticking to it, so like I say it's just on an even keel at the minute." (single male, late 40s, private tenant)

For this participant, a package of support provided via the Housing Advice Centre (from which he had been referred via the Jobcentre) secured this private rented sector accommodation beyond the planned eviction date via negotiation with the landlord and a Discretionary Housing Payment award, which bought sufficient time for him to secure social housing:

> "I was going to be made homeless at the end of the September… so I went to the Housing Advice Centre. They managed to sort everything out and they managed to get me a Discretionary Housing Payment. That topped up towards my rent and I managed to get that, and they managed to convince my landlord to keep me there until 1st December. That was good of them there… Then they helped me sign-up for the online, the Your Homes Newcastle… I went for a meeting at the Kenton housing office, with the letters from the housing advice centre. Then they managed to put me in band C, instead of band D, and that meant I could get somewhere a lot easier. Well, I'd have more chance, so that's what I did." (single parent, male, late 20s, social tenant)

We can see from these cases that the combination of securing benefits, addressing affordability and arrears issues via Discretionary Housing Payments, plus in some cases advice on debt or money management and/or securing alternative accommodation has paid dividends for these households.

Second, what is also clear, is that services in the city are managing to reach individuals before they prevent at services in crisis. For example, these two participants were approached by (and subsequently engaged with) Cherry Tree View outreach and the multidisciplinary team proactively, rather than seeking help themselves:

"A man just rang us one day and offered his services, some help" (single parent, female, early 30s, social tenant)

"I received a letter through the post… saying they were going to… see if they can help in any way. So I got in touch with them, which took a lot, because I don't trust that many people. I had a chat with [name] over the phone, I went down and met her, she told me what they were all about and it's gone from there." (single male, late 40s, private tenant)

Third, several participants were extremely positive about the manner of the support they had received. Key here was that services were seen to be approachable and friendly, explained things clearly in a way that the individual could understand, provided personalised support around their specific needs, and provided face to face support. Some of the specific success of the interventions seemed to relate to the positive relationship people had developed with an individual or small set of individuals. This was especially the case for those that had worked with the multidisciplinary team:

"the reason I like these girls is because they're friendly, they're approachable… if there's anything I ever need I just get in touch with them… they're very open and very approachable" (single male, late 40s, private tenant)

"it's been spot-on. It's been the best, I think, because I've got more confidence with them, rather than picking up the phone, and to be on the phone for ages trying to explain things, but then they tell you something which they don't explain. Once it's, like, face-to-face with them three, I felt more easier, because… I find it hard to talk to people, but they were just really laid-back and made us [me] feel comfortable. I could ask them anything, and they explained everything properly. (single parent, female, mid 40s, social tenant)

Such positive feedback about a specific individual was also the case for this man who had received effective support via a member of the Money Matters team accessed via the Housing Advice Centre. The individual accessed this support having failed to receive help via a third sector welfare rights agency or at the Jobcentre, though the Jobcentre did refer him on to the HAC:

"She [Money Matters advisor] literally… done everything. I told her, obviously, my water was going to go up and things like that. She applied for a water reduction for me… Sorted my council tax reductions out, everything. She just said, 'Am I okay to work on your behalf?' I had to sign something to say she were and then, that's it. Next thing you know, I started getting loads of letters, saying I'm getting this reduction, that reduction. She had done everything for me… made sure I could understand it. Made sure I could read it. I couldn't have asked for better from her" (single parent, male, late 20s, social tenant)

He explained that he particularly valued receiving support in person and having one key contact who could provide active referrals and engage with other support agencies as opposed to passing him between services: *"they need to know that people like myself, I'm old fashioned, I'd rather see somebody face-to-face than phone a call centre and get passed from pillar to post"*.

Fourth, in the context of many household's extremely low income described in previous sections, help to meet very basic needs in the immediate term – via fuel vouchers and food bank referrals – was clearly also valued in the sense of being essential to meet people's subsistence needs. Help

accessing to basic furniture and white goods was also very significant to people who received it, albeit that, as above, some participants continued to live without these things:

> "[the multidisciplinary team] helped me get some new furniture, i.e. a cooker and a fridge-freezer and a two-seater settee, which got delivered last Wednesday and it's just been installed this morning. It's absolutely brilliant". (single male, late 40s, private tenant)

We have also seen above that some young people valued the life skills and tenancy support afforded to them within supported accommodation services:

> "I couldn't cook at one point so they've helped us [me with] cooking and they've also helped us [me] with me confidence a bit by being in here…they've just helped us if I need help because of the self-anxiety so if I need help they'll come up" (single female, under 25, supported accommodation).

That being said, others had a clear and strong preference to live independently and not be 'held up' by services that deemed them to not yet by 'tenancy ready'.

Opportunities for service improvement
In addition to these positive experiences, interviewees also pointed to some more negative experiences of services and areas for potential improvement, as well as some of the limits of local intervention highlighted elsewhere in this report.

As is clear from our consideration of participants' financial circumstances above, while advice and help claiming benefits, Discretionary Housing Payments, and money/debt advice could in some cases substantially ease the financial pressures people were under, in some cases people were still left with far too little money to live on, often living at below a subsistence level with some of their very basic needs (for heating, food or basic furnishings) not met. The extent to which this issue is locally resolvable is limited, especially given the welfare reforms and local authority budget cuts described in detail in other chapters. The local levers available to service providers here include Discretionary Housing Payments, the Supporting Independence Scheme and the Crisis Support Scheme, each with specifically defined functions and cash limited. Newcastle have spent 100% of their Discretionary Housing Payment allocation but not topped this up. The local authority have decided to *reduce* the budget available for the Supporting Independence Scheme, despite high demand (see chapter four). The extent to which putting greater resources into such funds is possible will of course depend on local budget setting processes, and involve opportunity costs to other forms of spending. These interviews with households at risk or with recent experience of homelessness, however, do underline the immense value of and demand for such support.

What is also clear from these interviews is that not everyone experiences the same supportive and positive interaction with services providers in the city as those described above. One participant sought assistance from a third sector advice agency but received no help at all, only accessing effective support via the Housing Advice Centre after being directed there by the Jobcentre. Experiences like these re-enforce the value of proactive referrals rather than passive signposting for those needing help. Some interviews also explained that needing to access or being signposted to online or phone based advice or support services was problematic, often because interacting in this way was not easy for people on an interpersonal level (see above), because they struggled to access (and/or fund) the right equipment (phones, computers, the internet), or because they *"couldn't get*

through" (single parent, male, late 20s, social tenant), perhaps due to high demand. Once again, the value of face to face support from a named person was emphasised, with this participant explaining that she felt a relationship with her housing officer from her social landlord would have helped avoid the risk of eviction:

> "everyone's got a housing officer, everybody gets allocated one, but I don't even know who mine is… I think there should be closer contact, especially when you're not very good at reading letters and you don't know what your payments are and things. Everyone's circumstances change, it's real life… It shouldn't come to you being ready to be evicted and being in so much debt for you to be able to get support." (single parent, female, mid 40s, social tenant)

As this comment makes clear, despite concerted efforts to ensure early intervention opportunities are pursued, some individuals still reach crisis point before accessing support.

Participants also voiced frustration, familiar from other research (Stewart and Wright, 2018; Wright et al, 2018), regarding the value of employment support available via the Jobcentre. This participant for instance experienced the offer as depersonalised and unhelpful: *"All they've ever done is put me on these daft courses over the years, and I've never got a job out of any of them"* (single female, early 50s, social tenant). For others, it was the intense challenges of their daily lives (managing bills and debt, sustaining housing, having low/no residual income for travel) that meant requirements for them to look for work were extremely hard, even impossible, to meet[43].

For two participants in the sample, it was clear that the city's crisis and supported accommodation hadn't worked well for them. Both were now in more suitable accommodation, but had spent considerable periods literally homelessness. The issue for one was that he had a dog that he would not give up, barring him from hostel accommodation[44]. For the other young female participant, living in and being evicted from hostels has been part of a chaotic few years for her following multiple traumatic life events, including bereavement:

> "[they] couldn't put us in a hostel or anything. They could put me in a hostel… But I would have to give my dog up, and there's no way in the world that I would give my dog up for nobody. I was told by one person, 'Put your dog in a cat and dog shelter'. I went, 'I'll put you in cat and dog shelter!'" (single male, early 50s, private tenant)

> "I've been in a couple… I got put on the streets for two years… moved out of hostels and been kicked out of hostels, but obviously I've actually had my own place and everything like it's been all right" (single female, early 20s, social tenant)

Both were now in independent housing, and whilst this was working fairly well for the young woman quoted, the older male was profoundly struggling to manage, casting doubts on the sustainability of

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43 These concerns must of course be interpreted in the light of comments from key informants regarding the effectiveness of the partnership established with Jobcentre Plus via the Homelessness Prevention Trailblazer in Newcastle and more supportive, vulnerability-sensitive approaches to work-related conditionality said to have developed in recent years (see chapters four and seven).
44 It should be noted from the quantitative data presented elsewhere in this report suggests that exclusion from or churn through supported/crisis accommodation for other reasons is likely to be a larger problem in quantitative terms than dog ownership, notwithstanding the importance of this factor for this individual.

his situation without intensive and ongoing support and lending support to comments made by professionals in the city in the next chapter that mental health support is a gap for many households:

> "I nearly [left] this flat the other day… I was nearly back on the streets… I'd just had enough…. I need obviously more help because of the state of my mind and that… I'm just struggling with day-to-day life, really, to be honest… I'm finding it a big massive struggle having to run this flat on my own. See, I was with a partner all my, I've been with partners all my life." (single male, early 50s, private tenant)

As noted in the housing circumstances section above, several participants were unhappy with the area in which they had been housed, or in one single parents case anxious about where they would be accommodated following a stay in temporary accommodation.

Some very specific experiences on the part of two participants potentially point to other areas of weakness in Newcastle's network of homelessness prevention services. One woman we spoke to was residing in temporary accommodation having had to leave her social rented home due to domestic violence (with the support of the police and domestic violence services). While in her previous home, and receiving support through the city's multi-agency domestic abuse and violence team, she had been threatened with eviction by an Anti-Social Behaviour Officer because of noise linked to the abuse she was suffering from family members. Better inter- and intra-agency working may have avoided this threat of eviction, and associated stress for the tenant.

A couple that we spoke to also discussed a systems problem which occurred once given notice to quit and subsequently evicted from a PRS property. This household understood from advice they had been given that no help could be offered until they were actually being evicted, in stark contrast to the early intervention ethos of the city's homelessness prevention service. The result of this was that they incurred court costs of £850 in the context of already owing rent arrears that were preventing them accessing a more affordable and secure social tenancy. Their experience had been one of having to reach *"rock bottom"* before help was received, with the consequence of their financial situation getting even worse. Echoing proposals elsewhere in the report, it may be that further work to improve private rented sector eviction protocols, support and relationships with landlords could avoid some of these issues for other households in the future.

Conclusion
These interviews with 18 individuals with experience of homelessness or homelessness risk reinforce messages clear from other aspects of the study, as well as highlighting some additional considerations relevant to prevention in the city. Our account of participants' housing and financial circumstances underlines in sometimes shocking personal detail the very low income people are surviving on and the impact of this on their quality of life and security. Experiences of destitution – going without food and heating in particular – were common, so too going without basic furniture, struggling to pay for travel, and generally having to subsist on an extraordinarily low residual income, especially once deductions were taken into account. These circumstances were often what brought individuals in to contact with services, but in many cases persisted after supportive interventions had been made, albeit that these had ameliorated some aspects of the situation. This demonstrates the limits of the tools currently available at the local level to more adequately address the needs of some households.

We can clearly see that accessing social – and particularly council – housing and temporary/supported accommodation act as protective factors in various ways. Social housing gave the people we spoke to a sense of security even if still in financial difficulty, and a place to call and make home. Temporary and supported accommodation provided those we spoke to with a safe place to stay while securing or working towards a longer-term housing solution, although it was clear that households often felt 'in limbo' in such accommodation and concerned about whether their longer-term housing outcome would suit them, both financially and in terms of its location near friends and family. For the young people in supported accommodation we spoke to, some clearly found this environment valuable, while others felt hindered from moving on with their lives by conditions of 'tenancy readiness'. Some of the people we spoke to had histories of rough sleeping and seeking to/in fact accessing the city's hostels. This crisis accommodation seemed to form part of this chaotic period of their lives rather than a clear route out of it, with normal housing offering better prospects, but the need for ongoing support exceedingly clear for one single male in particular.

The experiences of those we spoke to point to some areas where local responses could be improved. Some had reached crisis point (e.g. the threat of eviction from social housing) apparently without a supportive intervention having been put in place. Others had not been effectively supported or referred to appropriate services when they initially sought help. Still others found particular services bureaucratic and not at all tailored to their needs, with employment support/expectations around work search highlighted here as both inadequate, and made harder in the context of people managing in situations of severe poverty. Struggles accessing and problems within the city's hostel system were also highlighted by several participants, so too the need for in-tenancy support for vulnerable households when in settled housing. Examples of failures in joint working, for instance between domestic abuse services and social landlord teams, were also present, as were instances of poor advice and missed opportunities for early intervention.

What was also abundantly clear from these interviews was that prevention services in the city had made a significant difference to many of those we spoke to. The biggest differences to participants' objective circumstances were seen when tangible financial help and advice was available to help resolve existing issues and make someone's financial circumstances more sustainable going forward. Discretionary Housing Payments and advice on/help applying for appropriate benefits had made very substantial differences to the circumstances of some of those we spoke to. What was also clear was the subjective gains to individuals' wellbeing, and the practical impacts, of receiving holistic and personalised support from named individuals that they found approachable and communicated with them clearly. Good relationships with particular staff underpinned the most positive comments we heard in this part of the study. In several cases, positive impacts were achieved following contact made with households by services, rather than the other way around, suggesting that the proactive early intervention approach pursued in the city is paying dividends in terms of accessing some households at risk before crisis, or before they have realised they are in crisis. In the context of the often severe poverty facing households we spoke to, practical subsistence help accessing food or paying for heating had helped many, as had other forms of support helping them access basic furniture. This underlines the value of the Crisis Support and Supporting Independence Schemes in the current context.

7. Evaluating homelessness prevention in Newcastle: key informant and frontline worker perspectives

This chapter uses new qualitative data generated via interviews and focus groups with strategic level key informants and frontline workers to deepen our understanding of the effectiveness, strengths, limitations, and weaknesses of approaches to homelessness prevention in Newcastle. It begins by summarising stakeholder views on the key strengths of the Newcastle approach to prevention and the enablers of that approach, before focusing in on a series of interventions that were highlighted as particularly effective, and participants' reflections of the relative effectiveness of the current approach from different household types. The next section considers the challenges, limitations and barriers impacting prevention efforts in the city. The following section turns to weakness and gaps in current provision identified by participants and pointing to where service improvements might usefully be directed.

Strengths and enablers

Key informants in Newcastle acknowledged the difficulties of demonstrating the effectiveness of the extensive preventative interventions in the city: *"What we can't tell you is what would have happened [without these preventative interventions]…. but we think it might be a lot worse if we hadn't done any of these things"* (Statutory sector KI). But as this initial quote begins to indicate, there was a strong consensus that the approaches adopted were making an important difference to homelessness risk and experience, and clear explanations given and evidence provided to support this perspective. Reflecting Newcastle's data-informed approach to homelessness prevention, key informants often cited numerical data in support of their contention that the approach was effective. The cash value of financial gains to low income households via welfare rights advice was frequently cited as a useful measure of the difference made:

> "collective annualised gains that we've achieved for residents has been just over the £30 million mark, so that's income that otherwise wouldn't have come into Newcastle… 19 staff within the council's welfare rights service… achieve around about £19 million per year… and the remainder of that £30 million is made up by external partners." (Statutory sector KI).

Other 'hard' markers of success cited included that the council do not use Bed and Breakfast accommodation as TA, the low (and much reduced) level of social sector evictions, and the volume of prevention activity as measured via statistical returns to MHCLG.

The qualitative aspects of this study indicate a series of enablers seen to underpin the strengths of Newcastle's approach to homelessness prevention. First, the most emphasised enabler was *leadership*, in two key forms which might be described as political and administrative. In terms of political leadership, the consistent support of political leaders in the city to the agenda of protecting the most vulnerable in the city was seen to be a key foundation of the approaches described:

> "political leadership… politically we're totally committed to doing all we can for these people who we as a Labour administration see as the most vulnerable people in our city. We want to do our very best for them and I think that support for the team means that they understand that commitment and are very keen to deliver on that, on our behalf" (Statutory sector KI)

"What's worked best I think is the political continuity, and that ongoing support for this" (Statutory sector KI)

Alongside the continuity and strength of this political leadership, administrative leadership within the local authority's homelessness team was also seen to be essential. Key informants described a particular mentality and *"thought leadership"* (Third sector KI) that had helped facilitate the ambitious approach to homelessness prevention described in this report:

"There's always been a couple of high-ranking officers in Newcastle City Council who are still there… who've been able to try and take some of that forward" (Third sector KI)

"it's about mentality at the beginning… led by [senior LA officer] and some of [their] colleagues… they're not uniquely good, but they are good… they are thinkers… [and] part of a number of local authorities who do try to really get under the skin of what the issue is. Unfortunately, the match-up with resources is the next challenge, but again, once you've had the ideas and you know what you want to achieve, then the resources are easier to get." (Third sector KI)

Statutory sector key informants at the forefront of the homelessness agenda themselves were very clear and explicit about the leadership role they felt the local authority should play in the current context, talking about the *"place based anchors"* and even *"local rights"* they could develop to achieve good outcomes. The legitimacy of this role was clearly identified as laying in the fact that local elected members of the Council are *"the only people who've got a mandate"* to develop a vision of *"this is how you should act in Newcastle"* (Statutory sector KI). Though the emphasis was overwhelmingly on *local* leadership, the interaction of these local factors with supportive Central Government agendas in the early 2000s was also acknowledged. More recently, Central Government priorities were seen to have threatened rather than supported this kind of approach, with cuts in other local authorities reportedly having led to *"a drain of intellectual capacity sometimes"* (Third sector KI). In Newcastle, however, strong leadership and commitment had facilitated and ensured a series of other 'enablers', specifically the development of a particular ethos of provision, investment and a partnership approach.

First, Newcastle's approach to homelessness prevention was described by key informants as reflective of a particular ethos embracing focused on problem solving and innovation to vulnerable households:

"as a city, we are quite… good at being innovative, or we try to be…. I'll sit round the table with other people from City Council and really there are no answers! But people keep trying to come up with them… We're constantly working and trying to look at ways of doing things slightly differently if we can." (Social housing sector KI)

"I've seen how it operates in other local authority areas and I think the fact that Newcastle made a commitment really early on, 'no B&B', is so important to the agenda because if you start from that ethos and say, 'It's not going to be tolerated', then I think you know you're setting out your stall really early. I don't think I've seen the other local authorities really come out same way on that." (Social housing sector KI)

Second, and of fundamental importance, this leadership and ethos has facilitated continued investment in homelessness prevention-related budgets in the face of cuts:

"we always were aware that prevention was better than dealing with the crisis point… things like money advisers, welfare rights advisers… we've protected that side… So where some [LAs] have made the decision that we can only do statutory stuff, we have maintained [it]" (Social housing sector KI)

"I think we've seen the difference with other core cities in terms of the political choices that have been made to kind of maintain non-statutory services, which is difficult in a fight locally, politically, when you've got big budget cuts to make." (Statutory sector KI)

"you have to give them credit for the work that they've done to protect frontline services. When you compare them to other cities even in the north, they have done fantastically well to continue to maintain the services that they provide" (Third sector KI)

Third, and relatedly, this continued investment was acknowledged to build on the historic presence of strong welfare rights and other advocacy services in Newcastle, including *within* the local authority, something that placed the city in a good position to negotiate the challenges of welfare reforms and develop strong homelessness prevention protocols and services:

"Newcastle [was] one of the early… pilots for Universal Credit… Historically there was a high quality, well resourced welfare rights service in Newcastle, so it began at quite a high pace. In many areas they wouldn't have that, so there was always a strategy, policy, information, facts and data." (Third sector KI)

"we've retained an in-house welfare rights service as well, I think that makes us quite unusual. I don't know how many other authorities have maintained those services in house, same with the debt advice. You know… six debt advisors. That's actually quite a lot really for something that isn't a statutory service." (Statutory sector KI)

The fourth key enabler identified as underpinning the city's homelessness prevention work was the partnership approach taken, which was described as adding significant value compared to services delivered in a less coordinated way:

"the active… inclusion approach… to treating all the issues together and providing information and training to workers… You may not be a homelessness prevention worker, but there is information about what to do and where to go and how to access information… having good provision of information and training on a systematic basis is helpful. You can easily go onto the website and find out who does what, how to do it, who do I need to speak to? That sharing of information has been quite positive." (Third sector KI)

"I think one of the things that we have done which has been extremely effective is to make it everyone's business. So that actually not just across the council and those of us who have a, if you like a statutory responsibility to have some provision but we've tried to work right across the sector and with partners outside of that to ensure that we're all supporting one another" (Statutory sector KI)

One key informant with significant knowledge of homelessness prevention across English local authorities felt that the internal structure of the local authority aided effectiveness, specifically, that the welfare and housing advice functions are within the same department and working to the same aims (to provide residents with the foundations of a stable life, see chapter four):

> "It almost seems a bit of a no-brainer when I say it out loud, but so many authorities, they're completely different departments and they jealously guard their own pots of money. Where, in Newcastle, it's seen as a much more holistic thing about, the link between poverty and homelessness, so I think that's really helped." (Third sector KI)

The effectiveness of current interventions

Some interventions or approaches were identified as being particularly crucial and effective at preventing homelessness in the current context. We highlight the most important of these, before considering key informants views on the relative effectiveness of current approaches for different household types.

Arrears-related forbearance and support on the part of social landlords, and in particular the city's largest provider and ALMO Your Homes Newcastle, was identified as crucially important mode of homelessness prevention. These key informants highlight the difference tolerating high arrears levels has made to levels of homelessness:

> "[our] arrears, the number looks high. In relative terms we're managing, and it's to be expected with the inbuilt delays; we know there will be arrears accruing on the account, and it's about getting people happy and in a position where they know what they need to be paying [their arrears off] regularly on a monthly basis… if we just withdrew that and… and stopped proactively contacting customers, we'd very soon see how valuable it has been" (Social housing sector KI)

> "we've gone up a couple of million pounds in rent arrears over the last two or three years, partly due to Universal Credit, partly due to the welfare reform such as the bedroom tax… there's that kind of forbearance, both by the landlord, but also, from what we understand, by individuals as well going without things. So the [homelessness] numbers themselves and the trends don't show, 'Oh, my God, it's awful', as you think that it maybe should, because it's almost being suppressed" (Statutory sector KI)

What is also clear from these quotes is the specific way in which ideas like success and effectiveness are being thought about in the current context. Getting tenants into a position to regularly pay off some of their arrears (rather than being arrears free), tolerating high levels of arrears as an organisation, and also acknowledging the necessity of tenants having to 'go without' to sustain this less than ideal (but better than homeless) situation are all positioned as markers of relative success in a very challenging context.

In this light, it is not surprising that **advice on benefit entitlements and income maximisation** was also identified as a key and effective intervention, especially when this work could be targeted upstream, including when a tenancy starts:

"I think support with benefit and also debt for me is the biggest - that's the big game-changer… the thing that we get the most results from." (Social housing sector KI)

In a context in which the level of benefits to which people are entitled were widely acknowledged to often not cover basic expenses, the importance of broader **money management and budgeting advice** was also seen to be key:

"Quite often budgeting, getting that pinned down, getting bill payments pinned down really at the start and making sure they know exactly what it is that they need to pay and when they need to pay it, is so important… it's almost a quick win to get the benefit entitlement sorted, and then we can get round to talking more about the money management" (Social sector KI)

Discretionary Housing Payments were seen as a *"really important tool"* (Social sector KI) contributing to homelessness prevention (see also Park, 2019 forthcoming). This theme emerged particularly strongly across the four frontline worker focus groups, with participants identifying DHP as the most used and useful of the preventative tools they had available. DHP's role in facilitating the city's proactive approach to homelessness prevention during the introduction of the bedroom tax and benefit cap were especially highlighted, particularly in light of housing stock constraints that meant that downsizing was not an option for many households: *"If everyone had come back and said, 'Yes, we'll move,' we didn't have the stock"* (frontline worker, housing support workers focus group). Most advisers and support workers thought that having a good working relationship with the local DHP staff was imperative to their preventative strategies. Frontline staff and key informants explained how DHP applications and decisions are frequently used as a means to flag the need for support and/or incentivise behavioural change to enable more sustainable solutions to financial crisis to be found:

"we've had quite a lot of referrals from the Discretionary Housing payment Team so they may have awarded but on a very short-term award but the family is needing some sort of other support… to look at other housing options" (frontline worker, homelessness prevention focus group

"the relationship we've got with this Discretionary Housing Payments team is very good… when they make an award, what they'll say to tenants is, 'We've awarded you £15 a week until the end of March on provision that you work with the employability services.' Or maybe they'll ask them to work with… advice and support workers. So they'll put like a condition on the award… trying to fix the problem… years ago, no conditions were ever given… and I think that works better now" (Social housing sector KI)

It was recognised, however, that more sustainable solutions were not always possible, even with support and/or the use of conditionality attached to DHP awards:

"Sometimes they're used on a long-term basis… at the end of the day, in order to prevent homelessness, that DHP needs to be long-term because actually there is a gap between your liable rent and the eligible housing costs and there's nothing to bridge that gap… The only solution is to give people money to pay the rent and that's the only thing that's going to stabilise somebody's housing situation." (Frontline worker, advice agencies focus group)

In these situations, either the household could re-apply and receive DHP over the sometimes very long term (*"… since 2013"* in some cases) or the DHP team could (and do sometimes) decide to reject a reapplication where conditions have not been met. A key informant explained that in such cases:

> "we struggle a little bit… we're stuck with somebody who has to pay £15 a week and they're on a job-seeking benefit. Or they're on a very low wage and it's just really tough for them. I think we struggle to know what to do in those situations because there isn't a lot out there… We'll make a note on their rent account saying, 'This person should be job searching' or, 'This person should be looking to move' or they should be doing X, Y and Z… we can't fix every situation." (Social housing sector KI)

DHPs were thus identified as a key and often effective intervention to avoid homelessness, but given the cash limited nature of the pot – and reluctance to keep re-awarding indefinitely – they are clearly not a panacea, with concerns also voiced about whether Central Government will maintain this funding stream at the levels required in the future.

For those in receipt of Universal Credit, **Alternative Payment Arrangements** were seen to be a key homelessness prevention intervention, in that they could ensure that for clients at risk of not paying their rent, this budgeting decision was taken out of their hands and automatically paid to the landlord:

> "the APA, essentially, protects rental income through housing elements deducted and paid directly to us, and that can just give people peace of mind as well… so it's like a really vital constant I suppose, in terms of managing and monitoring what the impact of Universal Credit is" (Social housing sector KI)

Frontline workers participating in focus groups did point, however, to some issues with Alternative Payment arrangements. First, they could take considerable time to process and set-up (with arrears potentially accruing in the meantime). Second, automatic higher-rate deductions to deal with pre-existing arrears were reported to leave claimants making repayments at an unaffordable rate, which made tenants and service providers less likely to seek Alternative Payment Arrangements, leaving the tenant at high risk of further future arrears. Whilst this mechanism was identified as a useful and sometimes effective prevention tool, there was substantial scope for DWP to improve its efficacy.

A strong message from key informants concerned the gains made via work funded by **the Homelessness Prevention Trailblazer**. Participants were clear that the major contribution here had been enabling prevention work to happen further upstream, rather than when households were nearing crisis. This key informant with national expertise felt that Newcastle's Trailblazer was more innovative in its aims and structure than those pursued in other areas:

> "some of them [the Trailblazers] were just money for old rope and really not doing anything radically innovative. Newcastle set out their story about what they wanted to do, which was very much about the cross-disciplinary stuff, really getting a strong working relationship, particularly with Jobcentre Plus colleagues… to recognise the signs of homelessness and flag up what Newcastle would call 'income shocks' more quickly, so that homelessness can be resolved much further upstream rather than having to wait for crisis point. In that respect, I think they did very well actually, to cover a lot of ground and they got some good people in" (Third sector KI)

Focusing in on the multidisciplinary team, key informants emphasised that whilst the numbers are small, the highly proactive approach to both case finding and support has been extremely valuable, even 'life changing' in some cases, something also borne out in our interviews with individuals who had experienced the service (see chapter six):

> "They've really made some quite good inroads of people and definitely prevented homelessness, not massive numbers of it, but the work they've done I think has been really good-quality work that I think will have been life-changing for some people, definitely" (Social sector KI)

> "The huge strength in the model is for the staff, basically, never to give up on somebody. No matter how many times you have to call, or post letters, or knock on the door, people aren't treated as people who are hard to reach, or who don't want to work at the service. It's understood that for the vast majority of people they do want help, but for whatever reason they're having a hard time seeking help." (Statutory sector KI)

Frontline workers participating in focus groups for this study agreed, highlighting the persistent approach of the team and their practice of making cases 'inactive', rather than close them down, periodically resuming contact to check circumstances and test receptivity to support. Having the resources and capacity available to do so was recognised as unusual: *"we get to be a bit more persistent and we get to be a bit more flexible about chasing people down as opposed to some of the other individual agencies that can't, just don't have the capacity to do that"* (frontline worker, homelessness prevention focus group). A key informant also emphasised that the low caseload model for the multidisciplinary team was key to its effectiveness: *"The Trailblazer works fantastically well when you give the caseworkers quite low caseloads"* (Statutory sector KI).

These key informants highlighted that some of the innovations taken forward by the team were in some senses quite simple, involving clear, direct lines of communication between service providers working with vulnerable residents and utilising the information already available within relevant systems to identify those at risk. These 'no brainer' changes while *"not rocket science"* were clearly seen to represent important strides in terms of improving services and maximising the impact of prevention work:

> "we [homelessness support provider] have the direct-line numbers of job coaches in the Jobcentres, and they have our direct line number, so it isn't rocket science in that sense" (Third sector KI)

> "for people who, for whatever reasons, struggle to communicate with their work coaches about the disadvantage... we can do it systemically. It shouldn't have to rely on the most vulnerable people to identify all of their needs, but at present it does, and so the most disadvantaged suffer from failing to self-identify, but the information is there within the system" (Statutory sector KI)

The second key informant quoted here lamented that this common sense approach of utilising information already held about resident vulnerabilities was not being used in the continued roll out of Universal Credit, and in particular the targeting of Universal Support.

Though the Trailblazer funding from Central Government was short-term (ending in March 2019) key informants clearly supported the multidisciplinary team model being continued in some form. They

saw scope to widen the variety of 'disciplines' and organisations represented in the team (especially to include mental health colleagues), widen the scope of the team's aims (to support people into employment as well as preventing homelessness), and take some of the lessons from the pilot and apply them in other services. One key lesson drawn from the pilot concerned the *intensity of support* and *length of time engaging with support* that especially vulnerable residents needed to make a difference, though the resource implications of such an expensive approach were acknowledged as challenging. That being said, one key informant involved with the team emphasised that some of the core benefits related to *"process… systems… moving blockages and making things happen"* and that *"it doesn't take money to do that"*, and felt that many of the gains associated with the model could be pursued by continuing to build on those good practices (e.g. strong referral routes between existing services).

Perhaps the intervention that received the most extensive positive commentary in terms of its perceived value and effectiveness was the **partnership with DWP and Jobcentre Plus** developed via the Trailblazer Programme. One statutory key informant described this link with the Jobcentre as *"our most positive partnership relationship in Newcastle"* (Statutory sector KI). The joint ways of working now established were seen to be *"amazingly helpful"* (Statutory sector KI) in enabling support to be directed at households in the early stages of homelessness risk when interventions were perceived to be more effective and before households would have approached third sector advice agencies for help:

> "people tend to come [be referred via the Jobcentre] quite a way upstream. They're either in a tenancy, which is obviously insecure and about to fail but at least they've got something, or they're staying with family and friends and they've still got quite a lot of goodwill left. Often, people who will present to us [voluntary sector homelessness service] where immediately it's like, 'I need to leave because things have broken down.' Things tend to have broken down a lot, and mediation is really, really difficult to then intervene and provide that type of support" (Third sector KI)

Key informants described how in various ways this partnership work via the Trailblazer had precipitated a 'culture shift' in services. First, within the city's Jobcentre's, practice had shifted from *"helping [already] homeless people"* to prevention:

> "[the Trailblazer] helped dispel some of the myths around homeless… commonly held beliefs that… people couldn't go and get advice around housing unless you were actually homeless… a lot of the people we've referred as homelessness prevention cases rather than homeless people wouldn't have got picked up before... that's the big cultural shift… the emphasis on prevention rather than the emphasis on helping homeless people" (Statutory sector KI)

Examples of work coaches being able to *"hit… problems early"* (Statutory sector KI), included spotting potential debt problems before they had even arisen and helping the individual avoid them, and identifying that a claimant was vulnerable and initiating an Alternative Payment Arrangement before they risked arrears. Frontline workers reported that even those not yet in any kind of crisis or housing need could have a *"comprehensive conversation"* spanning housing as well as employment issues within the Jobcentre and thus *"be able to manage on their own"* (frontline worker, housing support workers focus group).

Second, the process had brought the city's Jobcentre into the *'everyone's business'* approach at the core of Active Inclusion Newcastle: *"we don't want to be seen as an organisation that's working on its own. We work together with partners through the city…. recognising that we have a lot of the same client group… to support those people on their journey."* (Statutory sector KI). This was seen to reflect a shift to *"a much less adversarial environment"* in which Jobcentre staff are seen as a resource and partner, as opposed to the past, when, it was ventured by one key informant, they were *"maybe [seen] as the enemy a little bit"* (Statutory sector KI).

Several key enablers of these positive shifts were identified, including the **resources** associated with the Trailblazer programme:

> "they've got all of those Jobcentre Plus staff trained, they've established really good working protocols with Jobcentre Plus, with the prisons, with hospital discharge teams. They've got a lot of stuff covered which a lot of local authorities do struggle with, because currently, a lot of them just don't have the capacity to do it. The Trailblazer has bought in that capacity" (Third sector KI)

The **co-location**[45] of housing advisers *within* Jobcentres was also seen to be fundamental to the perceived success of the approach. This 'in person' presence was seen to add significant value, in terms of mutual learning, building common cause and reciprocal investment in achieving positive outcomes between frontline workers:

> **"**being based with the DWP, just an understanding of what the interview process is, seeing their interaction with customers… it has… provided us with the reassurance that there's a shared goal on the frontline to make sure people are managing their claims… DWP [has] also really gained I feel, from a housing-related side. So previously, if they were managing a JSA claim or an ESA claim there wasn't really a need to talk about rent or to talk about whether they had fallen into arrears, whether they were at risk of homelessness… I look back now and I think of quite a lot of the preventative work we've done and think, well, how would it have worked perhaps if we hadn't been there?… being physically based somewhere, and both invested in trying to sort out the situation…. it's had a… positive [impact]" (Social housing sector KI)

Co-location was also seen to be valuable in terms of making advice more accessible to residents – both practically and psychologically:

> **"**being based at the Jobcentre has been really beneficial, because there's people who wouldn't necessarily want to go and speak to the housing officer, but if they're just there and they've got a query about their rent they might just call over and see us in a fairly neutral environment, rather than seek to come up for a face-to-face appointment" (Social housing sector KI)

One very practical impact of the Trailblazer was seen to be **more extensive and effective use of 'easements'** available (since 2014) to Jobcentre Plus work coaches to suspend claimant's work-related requirements during times of 'domestic emergency' including homelessness and other 'crisis'

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[45] Other services in the city were also reported to be co-locating to maximise their reach, for example Shelter are working out of local foodbanks to ensure their services are available and visible to poor families. This was seen as especially important and valuable given foodbanks' locations across the city when other neighbourhood services had closed down and families could struggle to travel to the city entre.

situations. Use of such easements has been reportedly patchy and inconsistent in the past (Fitzpatrick et al, 2017), but this key informant explained how the Trailblazer partnership between the council and DWP had changed this in Newcastle:

> "[easements] were very, very rare, people saw them as very exceptional whereas since the Trailblazer, that was part of the training that we did with staff… 'these are the easements that you can use, this is what they look like, this is how you should use them'. So now… those easements have become much more widely used and much more appropriately used" (Statutory sector KI)

Easements initially put in place because of homelessness reportedly now enabled a better understanding of claimants' circumstances, including the background factors precipitating their homelessness (e.g. addiction issues or domestic violence), meaning that further easements for these domestic emergencies could then be used to support the claimant further. Frontline workers who participated in this study argued that stronger partnerships between the Jobcentre and other services had also helped claimants avoid being erroneously sanctioned, and the lengthy mandatory reconsideration and appeals process that would then ensue. They did voice a note of caution regarding the limits of improved use of homelessness related easements, highlighting that some individuals in need of them did not self-identify to the Jobcentre and may not be in touch or engaging with partner agencies to help them do so.

More generally, frontline workers who participated in this study gave a detailed sense of the work housing advisers in the city undertake, highlighting that a core part of their role constituted **unpicking and resolving incorrect payments of UC**. They explained that the HMRC 'real time' information used to determine on-going payments on income and rents was often wrong, leading to underpayments or no payments at all: *"we're all finding with Universal Credit, we're working blind, because we don't have the access to information that we need about income, rent…"* (frontline worker, homelessness prevention and response focus group).

Facilitating access to IT equipment and the internet for people to manage their UC claim was also cited as a profoundly important preventative intervention given the reliance of UC on online accounts. This was particularly the case for those on the full Claimant Commitment requiring them to evidence job seeking for 35 hours a week. In the context of these kinds of priorities and 'blind spots' the links made via the Trailblazer initiative were identified as of great importance once again.

Beyond these overarching messages regarding the most effective and valuable specific interventions, it was very clear from key informants and frontline workers that current homelessness prevention work in the city caters better to some groups and households types than others.

There was a view that families with children were often, comparatively speaking, easier to help than other household types. This appeared to reflect first, their greater entitlements to support through the social security and wider welfare system (e.g. via Child Benefit and the full 'priority need' rehousing entitlement though clearly notwithstanding cuts, caps and freezes that have effected this group too) and second, the richer set of services available to them in the local area (e.g. Children's Services):

"I think the families are largely okay. I think that the provision is good, you've got the temporary accommodation, which is really good, Cherry Tree View and the size of the families can largely be catered for in the social housing stock and obviously, if they're coming in as homeless then they've got priority needs, so they will be found accommodation pretty quickly. You'll not find people in temporary accommodation for very long, it's a matter of a couple of weeks largely." (Third sector KI)

"I would say tenants with families - young children, like under 18 - I would say that it's possibly easier because they generally have a bit more money coming in because they've got benefits for the children… you can tap into children's social care. There's parent support workers, schools. If a tenant has children and they say to us, 'I'm struggling, I need help' it's a lot easier to find them help, I think" (Social housing sector KI)

Specifically, *smaller* families with *two parents* were deemed easier to help, with **single parent and larger families** facing particular issues linked to low income under UC (including the 'two child limit'), limited access to work, the costs and practicalities of access childcare, the benefit cap, and/or migration related issues for some larger BME families.

Single people and particularly **single men** were thought generally to be harder to help, often reflecting that they had access to fewer/less robust support networks (formal or informal), and very limited access to benefits and welfare support (see also Fitzpatrick et al, 2018a), though of course this group now have greater entitlements under the Homelessness Reduction Act, albeit not to the full rehousing duty. The challenge of helping single person households was, of course, particularly exacerbated where individuals were affected by the bedroom tax:

"a single person who's on essentially £300 odd a month, it's very difficult because there's not really anywhere… there's just nowhere to go. Single people might not have… family and friends… If a single person comes in and says, 'I'm struggling, I need help'… There's not a lot we can do… There's really nowhere to go with a single person apart from them changing their behaviour, whereas with a family you can put pressure on them in other ways and try and get them to work with other services." (Social housing sector KI)

"I think as a single benefit claimant with no family, and so like a small single benefit unit, is probably a difficult one, because if you think about it, it's just generally the bills to pay, it's quite a small allowance to be on if they're under-occupying. Very quickly there can be issues… very quickly any change in income can, obviously, place them at risk" (Social housing sector KI)

Those with complex needs were a group identified as significantly less well served than others by current homelessness prevention and related interventions. Acknowledging the enormous focus on homelessness prevention and supportive interventions for other groups, this key informant argued that by contrast *"for the client group who are more marginalised, I don't think it's changed at all. I don't think there's been any shift"* (Third sector KI). Indeed, it was clear from key informants and frontline workers that the nature of services in the city facilitated the 'churn' of this group within the system rather than their progress out of it:

"if you've got a person that's got a high level of multiple, complex needs, that's been evicted from everywhere, that's got chronic drug and alcohol problems, mixed with chronic mental

health issues, I think that there's clear gap there for that customer group at the moment" (Social housing sector KI)

"[for this group] it's already gone so far… we can put them in an environment [temporary accommodation] where it's not going to be helpful to the way they're feeling at that time, so they're not going to stay. They're going to end up either leaving and we'll lose them or they end up getting evicted and then we're back to square one." (Frontline worker, homelessness prevention and response focus group)

This voluntary sector key informant felt that services targeting this group could be strengthened as regards *access to* and *sustainment of* accommodation, including via the provision of holistic and personalised support around mental health, addiction issues and needs:

"We find it really difficult for anybody to get access to accommodation or to keep accommodation where their needs are multiple… the underlying issues are mental health or addictions… Unless you can provide support around those individual needs, those personal circumstances, addiction/mental health problems/physical problems, the roof over their head is only ever going to be a temporary solution" (Third sector KI)

They also argued mainstream homelessness services in the city were still not attuned to the specific needs of this group, and claimed that 'problematic' clients with a reputation presenting at services can get a different response to those whom providers have 'never seen before'. A distinct but related point concerned the physical environment of homelessness services in the city, which was described by one key informant as *"pretty poor by today's standards"* falling short of offering of a 'welcoming' and 'psychologically informed environment' that treats people 'with dignity and respect': *"you go in there and there's the plastic chairs bolted to the floor and the bars up the reception. I think they need to go on a bit more of a journey"* (Third sector KI).

Key informants felt that addressing the nature of congregate supported and hostel accommodation in the city was absolutely key to addressing the needs of those with the most complex needs:

"there's a conversation to be had with them around whether 720 bed spaces is the best use of the money, and how many people in there are stuck and really should be moved on" (Third sector KI)

"I think my goal is to take away the hostel living… shared places for people because I don't think they're right for the 21st Century but that's mostly what our [provision is]… the single people's support is in old-fashioned hostel style, so I think my goal would be to let's change all of that, but clearly to get [there] we need to spend some money to begin with. We'd have to find some capital in order to build another homelessness provision." (Statutory sector KI)

Other participants agreed, arguing for reinvestment in and protection of housing support budgets to sustain people with support needs in mainstream housing:

"support for people once they're in their tenancy, to sustain that tenancy is lacking in the city. We are running out of money to provide support services so we get people, vulnerable people who have got all the benefits that they should have, they're secure, they're in their tenancy,

we're getting their rent but their ability to manage on a day-to-day basis or week-to-week basis relies on a member of our staff going out and checking on them, 'Is your heating still on? Is this still on?'" (frontline worker, advice agencies focus group)

On this point, participants argued for the prioritisation of developing and scaling up Housing First provision in the city: *"I would prioritise the Housing First development actually, because I think that's where the gap is"* (Social housing sector KI). Study participants recognised that there was some Housing First provision in the city, but had some doubts about the fidelity of the that provision to the principles of the model, in particularly highlighting the use of transitional hostel accommodation for those deemed to need Housing First while mainstream housing was secured: *"Basically, they'll put people into… supported housing for a few months, and then they'll have a panel meeting. Then they decide who's ready for Housing First and then they allocate that way, which isn't Housing First. It's a rapid move on, at best"* (Third sector KI). A further concern voiced by frontline workers was that the wrap-around support associated with the city's Housing First provision was not adequate.

Key informants and in particular frontline workers identified **younger people** as facing specific and sometimes acute issues in relation to homelessness risk and pointed to various ways of improving responses for this group. A core issue was the limited support available to younger people through the social security system and the implications of this for their housing options. As such the focus was on the traditional 'under 25' group of young people but also on 'under 35s'. This group where identified as suffering a 'double whammy' constituting entitlement to only low levels of benefits and high work-related conditionality which left them at high risk of sanction[46]:

> "single under-35s… have the hardest time… we're really struggling… single under-35s, under-25s, who are on a low rate of Universal Credit… if we don't put an Alternative Payment Arrangement in place, we never see their rent and we used to be able to prevent situations like that with Housing Benefit and we can't prevent them in the same way anymore." (Frontline worker, advice agencies focus group)

> "we run affordability checks and anybody under 25 technically cannot afford to run a tenancy, they can't pay their bills but we'll still let them have one [a tenancy] but we know, we tell them right from the start, 'If you pay all of your essential costs, you're probably going to come out with about £2 for yourself'… then we get a lot of vulnerable young people who are on full claimant commitment and… it's very easy for them to get sanctioned because they don't turn up to appointments, they don't remember they've got to do stuff." (Frontline worker, advice agencies focus group)

Young people estranged from their family were identified as in a particularly vulnerable position, so too young people who were highly mobile across the region, something seen to be common. This was seen to often put young people on the wrong side of local connection rules in Newcastle:

> "young people… seem to move around quite a bit and it's not clear what service they can access. I think part of the problem… [with] Newcastle [is] with it being a city centre is that if somebody turns up in the area and are perhaps from a nearby or neighbouring authority, Newcastle will try

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[46] This echoes the findings of Fitzpatrick et al (2018) that young people are most likely to experience destitution (Fitzpatrick et al, 2018a).

and deflect back because they're not necessarily funded for that individual. There's a bit of to'ing and fro'ing" (Third sector KI)

In light of issues like this, one key informant highlighted the potential for developing better links with Children's Services, and felt that there was a case for broadening attention to youth transitions out beyond looked after children and to the wider cohort of young people at risk during the transition to adulthood:

"there's always been a 'will we, won't we' relationship with children's services… It's had its ups and its downs and sometimes, they talk about joint commissioning and sometimes, they just want to fund their own leaving care services and nothing else. I think that could definitely be encouraged to see it as, not just about statutory children's transitions, but the wider young person population being helped to ease the transition into adulthood." (Third sector KI)

This participant elaborated that this kind of 'life course preventative approach' was necessary to minimise the likelihood of disadvantaged young people today becoming those with complex and entrenched needs tomorrow: *"if we don't get that [the transition to adulthood] right, that is the pipeline of complex needs further down"*. Particularly relevant here in this key informant's view was the nature of the supported accommodation available to young people in the city:

"I don't think it's any secret really that probably, the [young people's supported accommodation] in Newcastle is just too big and it's just about managing risk really, rather than providing meaningful support to help young people on a more progressive path in life…. it's about sixty beds there, all on one site, all together…. it's just trying to manage crisis constantly" (Third sector KI)

In their view, 'migrating' from this bigger congregate accommodation model to a mixed range of interventions, likely including smaller supported accommodation units and Housing First for Youth, should be a key priority for the council, albeit that they recognised the financial barriers to doing so: first given the *"economies of scale"* provided by a larger service, and second, given the need to fund overlapping services for a period of time, a *"double whammy"* that is no doubt hard to manage in the context of radically reduced and still shrinking budgets.

Other key informants highlighted the challenges facing **looked after children during their transition out of care**, highlighted the particular issues faced by young people living in group care situations and facing a radical and swift transition to independent living. This transition was seen to involve challenges including loneliness, and the absence of life skills, but to be made even harder in a context where young people would be left with *"no money"*: *"That's quite a hard reality, isn't it? Who would want that really?"* (Social housing sector KI).

Various **migrant groups** were also highlighted as poorly served, although here the issues were recognised to have origins far beyond the local authority. Particularly frustrations surrounded the Home Office's non-compliance with the Homelessness Reduction Act's duty to refer:

"If… we could just get government to get the Home Office to comply with the Homelessness Reduction Act and give 56 days' notice of the end of an asylum process… They say it's 28, but it's not…. it should be totally possible to share with local authority so that we can plan and prepare

for move on accommodation. It isn't. We get 14 days sometimes... So much homelessness could be prevented by joined-up information sharing within government" (Statutory sector KI)

European migrant households were highlighted as a group who had been particularly badly impacted by the roll out of Universal Credit. The key current issue here appeared to be the time consuming habitual residency tests that those seeking to claim UC must navigate prior to receiving any benefits. Frontline workers highlighted high rates of rejected applications, mandatory reconsiderations and appeals, all of which could leave European nationals with long periods (up to several months) without payment and no access to the advanced payments. In this situation households could build up large arrears, with their homelessness only prevented where landlords were prepared to tolerate these. Challenges supporting those with no recourse to public funds were also highlighted by key informants, and recognised to often be compounded by additional issues including a lack of familiarity with services and language difficulties.

Finally, important differences concerning the effectiveness of current approaches to homelessness prevention were highlighted in relation to the tenure of the household in question. While a tapestry of protocols and services now operate to protect social tenants in the city from high risk of homelessness and eviction (particularly tenants of the city's ALMO), finding **those at risk within the private rented sector** was still seen to be a substantial challenge, despite gains made via the multidisciplinary team and use of predictive analytics (see chapter four and above):

"It has been more difficult to contact [private tenants] ... I don't think it's that they're harder to work with but, obviously, it's harder to get to the point of deciding that they're the people that you should be contact[ing]. There's no natural route in... That's been more difficult" (Statutory sector KI)

Frontline workers who took part in study focus groups cited local authority efforts to improve links with PRS landlords, including by offering accreditation and a code of practice. That being said, they reported that most households presenting as homeless from the PRS did so only when eviction proceedings were well underway, which was seen as too late to prevent homelessness. There therefore appears to remain further scope for interventions seeking to identify at risk private tenants early. Some frontline workers emphasised the need for Central Government action in this area e.g. requiring private landlords to notify the local authority of impending evictions, though one key informant felt that there was also considerable scope for local action to bring private landlords into the network of actors with a role to prevent homelessness: *"Is there any way that we could have some interventions or some support for private landlords where there is an incentive for them to put a referral into the local authority if they are minded to serve a Section 21 notice?"* (Third sector KI).

Challenges, limitations and barriers
It was very clear from key informant and frontline worker testimony that the city's homelessness prevention efforts face profound challenges and limitations beyond the immediate control or influence of the local authority, and a series of practical barriers to further progress.

Returning to a theme that has cut through this report, it was clear that despite proactive, persistent and joined-up preventative work, the 'best case' scenario for many households was 'just getting by' and avoiding homelessness, rather than any more ambitious outcome of living a fulfilling and comfortable life or even simply one free from financial struggle and out of poverty. As one statutory

key informant put it: *"The most we would describe ourselves as achieving is some degree of mitigation. We do not think we have necessarily improved people's lives… [but] we think people's lives may have been worse if we hadn't have done what we've done"* (Statutory sector KI). A voluntary sector key informant explained that sometimes local interventions can only *"keep the wolf from the door for a little while"* (Third sector KI), which in their view didn't amount to 'true prevention' but was inescapable in the context of current Central Government policy:

> "In my mind, true prevention: it's a sustainable outcome. It's setting people on a path where actually they will never come to your door again. That's the ultimate that we would want to achieve. Prevention in reality is a sticky plaster. It's 'let's stop the crisis until the next crisis'… if we're talking about having an affordable housing solution for people, that necessarily isn't in the gift of the local authority because of the constraint by Central Government policy around welfare provision, and that just does not meet the needs of individuals." (NCC-KI9-CSL)

This characterisation of the limitations of local homelessness prevention work also manifested on the frontline. One focus group participant explained that in the context of the **radically reformed and less generous welfare benefit system**, their work was characterised not by *"big wins"* but by *"tiny wins, tiny little steps forward"* (frontline worker, homelessness prevention focus group). Workers described often only being able to render someone's situation marginally 'more bearable' as opposed to substantively better in any significant sense. In this context, soberingly, workers were sometimes left describing 'empathy' as their only remaining tool while explaining to residents the financial shocks they were to be faced with (e.g. when moving onto Universal Credit):

> "[we] try and just make the situation that little bit more bearable really for them….The system isn't going to change for them and navigating their way through that… showing a bit of empathy when you're doing it and saying, 'I understand this feels terrible. This is not what you're expecting. I can't raise your hopes up on this. I'd be wrong to raise your hope up.'" (frontline worker, homelessness prevention focus group)

It was very clear from study participants comments that poverty, arrears and thus homelessness risk were all 'baked in' to how the national welfare system now operates. **Universal Credit** was the key example of this, with waiting times highlighted as a key problem and one that local level actors have no power over:

> "we can only work with what we've got... We can support people, we can advise people, we can contact utility provides. We can do all those things but we can't fix the problems with Universal Credit. When somebody makes a claim and has to wait all that time, there's nothing we can do about that." (Social housing sector KI)

In addition to being managed in a way that generates risk of financial shocks and poverty, the administration of Universal Credit also constrains the local authority's capacity to proactively identify and help those at risk in comparison to the locally administered precursor Housing Benefit system. Key informants described strong joint working and information sharing processes to target households effected by the benefit cap before the introduction of UC, but explained that for UC claimants, DWP *"simply refuse"* to notify the council about households who've been capped (Statutory sector KI). This statutory sector participant explains that the reasoning behind this is that in the Government's view, individuals in need of assistance *"ought to flag themselves up to us, rather*

than DWP proactively identifying them because that's, in their view, disenfranchising the client" (Statutory sector KI). They went on to acknowledge that *"there is a logic to it"* but that from a local homelessness prevention perspective that couldn't agree with it. Further frustrations and challenges related to the lack of responsiveness of DWP bureaucracy, which was described as *"frustratingly slow… complicated"* (Statutory sector KI). This, alongside national processes and guidance that are *"set in stone"* were described as a barrier to effective responses locally, albeit one that partners sought to work around: *"we can't always do everything we want to locally but normally we try and work with partners to come up with a way of serving people as best we can"* (Statutory sector KI).

In this context, there was a widely and strongly held view among both key informants and frontline workers that increasingly, for some households, no help that the city's services are able to provide is *"really enough help"* and prevention is becoming *"harder and harder"* (Statutory sector KI):

> "since 2013, but particularly the last couple of years… the frontline staff or volunteers [have been] talking about the kind of problems that people are coming to them with… [and how] we've done the budgeting with someone and actually they're in a negative budget before they've even started. We don't have any options for them... A few years ago this never would have really been talked about. It was our frontline advisers started to say a few years ago, 'We can't advise anyone out of those kind of situations.'" (Statutory sector KI)

> "what can be quite difficult is when you've got everything sorted as best you can, and people still can't afford to live basically. The budgets are so restricted because of the benefit freeze that you can do all your financial capability, but, basically, unless they start work, it's not going to work. They aren't going to be able to maintain that budget" (Social housing sector KI)

Frontline workers who took part in focus groups for this study reiterated this story, and the central role of welfare reforms and austerity in driving these 'harder to help' cases, explaining that the work needed to support each of those presenting had increased, and cases were taking longer to close as resolutions were more difficult to find:

> "We get people who come to us who don't… have enough money and we're never going to get them enough money… that's a worry" (frontline worker, advice agencies focus group)

> "you're having to do so much more with that person because of the barriers… If there are things we can't control like… DWP… you're having to do more with what you've got… cases [take] longer as well… you can't move people on as well… There is just not the solution and you're just helping them juggle a bit really and not being able to move them and that's what's tough… Not being able to turnover things" (frontline worker, homelessness prevention and response focus group)

It was acknowledged that for some households the solution to their problems was simply more money to alleviate their poverty (rather than better ways of working in partnership, for example) and local opportunities to achieve that outwith the central welfare state are extremely limited: *"actually, what people need is direct money as opposed to 'people working better.'… There are some people that would benefit from supported help to live their life differently, but some people it's just pure poverty"* (Statutory sector KI). For others, long-term rather than time limited support was what was needed and such long-term provision was under severe restrictions in the current financial context

(see above). The combination of this trend towards increasingly irresolvable cases linked to welfare reforms, and the wider context of austerity was described by one participant as leaving the local authority *"stretched to the limits"* (frontline worker, homelessness prevention and response focus group).

Further challenges and limitations were identified in relation to **the nature and structure of funding streams**. Most important, the backdrop of radical contraction in local government finances that has disproportionately affected Newcastle was highlighted, and this is the context in which the gaps and weaknesses in current provision identified below must be understood. As one voluntary sector key informant described it *"local authorities are basically fighting with one hand tied behind their back… cuts to central government grants have been a massive challenge and will continue to be"* (Third sector KI). The dual task of managing cuts and transforming services to better respond to poverty (linked to welfare reform) was seen as an extremely difficult one:

> "One of the impacts of the cuts and the culture change required to respond to the interconnected natures of the welfare reforms means that services… are going through transition. Going through some degree of cuts… responding to high demands that are related to poverty, but haven't necessarily got the time or the capacity to change their offer to respond to poverty, because it's caught in that cycle of crisis rather than that transformation." (Statutory sector KI)

Key informants also noted that in this context the local authority quite simply could not fund everything it wished to *"because there isn't the funding to do it"* (Third sector KI). Examples from this report include but aren't limited to: floating support, face to face support for those seeking Council Tax support, long opening hours at libraries for the digitally excluded, and a Supporting Independence Scheme that met demand. One statutory sector key informant also highlighted the negative impacts of cuts on workforce training and development and the constraints cuts have placed on giving staff the time and capacity to develop the skills needed to do things differently and better. They particularly emphasised the impacts of this on Housing Advice Centre staff and those working in the supported housing sector. There was concern that the future management of ongoing cuts might put strain on face-to-face modes of support, something which was seen as undesirable and ineffective for vulnerable groups:

> "in the world of becoming more digital… that face-to-face contact is needed for this very vulnerable group. I would hope that in the future… we just don't take that away. I think speaking on the phone is fine but actually seeing someone face-to-face and being able to do all that support is a lot more effective when they're there with you… able to walk in somewhere and get a drop-in-type service, because people who are vulnerable or in a crisis, they don't neatly fit into, 'You can ring this number at ten o'clock when the lines open' kind of thing! Sometimes they might just think, today's the day I'm going to sort it out and I just want somewhere to go where I can do that." (Social housing sector KI)

Other Central Government funding streams, while welcome and enabling service expansion and innovation, came with challenges too. As discussed above, the set of interventions and reforms pursued via Trailblazer funding were seen in overwhelmingly positive terms by the key informants involved, but the nature of the short-term funding stream brought challenges concerning how to sustain these gains in the context of on-going overall budget cuts:

> "we're definitely needing to think about legacy planning and what we're going to do with some of what I think is really good work that's almost just starting to bear fruit… That's difficult in a local authority budget planning context… when you're trying to think about incorporating budget reductions" (Statutory sector KI)

Key informants also highlighted the limitations of 'fixed cohort' funding like the Social Impact Bond (SIB) targeting rough sleeping and the Fair Chance Fund (2015-2018). The funding structure meant that when the number of referrals designed to be handled by the scheme had been reached *"you've got to stop"* regardless of demand or need, and in the context of being *"in an area with such entrenched poverty, there's a fresh pipeline of complex needs coming through all the time"* (Third sector KI). Another challenge relating to the nature of Central Government funding streams concerned their enduringly 'siloed' nature which reportedly makes it *"really difficult to create integration"* locally (Statutory sector KI). More generally, this key informant argued that there was a disjuncture between Newcastle's ambitions around homelessness prevention and Central Governments ability to resource and support it:

> "what Newcastle have tried to do is be on the front foot… be establishing the right kind of protocols, the right kind of relationships… they've had a very forceful approach to upstreaming prevention, which hasn't always been matched by the government's ability to resource it and to back it up at a departmental level." (Third sector KI)

Frustration was also voiced about the priorities and criteria driving Central Government funding allocations. The local authority felt that there had been a shift – reflected in funding decisions – from a focus on homelessness prevention to responding to crisis, which fundamentally disadvantaged Newcastle in getting support to pursue and further develop it's early prevention focus. Funding allocations that prioritised high users of Bed and Breakfast accommodation with high levels of rough sleeping, while understandable, were also seen to create *" a financial incentive to have a problem, not to prevent a problem"* (Statutory sector KI). Being 'penalised for success' was also a theme that emerged in frontline worker focus groups. One key informant interpreted this as a failure of the government to learn the lessons of the Trailblazer programme.

An additional limitation with its source in Central Government policy identified by key informants in Newcastle concerns **the Homelessness Reduction Act**, and the key contours of this challenge were discussed in chapter four. In summary, while the more holistic and preventative 'spirit' of the new legislation was seen as extremely positive and welcomed, it was felt that prevention practice in Newcastle already surpassed that required by the Act and that the new duties did not go far enough to further enhance the city's capacity to prevent homelessness. This is of course consistent with the Act having very positive impacts in other areas with less of a historic focus on prevention. Various specific challenges associated with the new legislative framework were identified, including that the focus on being at risk of homelessness within 56 days still represented a broadly 'crisis' focus and that the new Duty to Refer does not extend to some important public agencies (GPs and Clinical Commissioning Groups, and Home Office asylum seeker accommodation) and wasn't appropriately used by some agencies (e.g. Community Rehabilitation Companies).

A final barrier identified by key informants concerned **data protection and sharing**. Having a *"whole picture of someone's circumstances"* via information sharing was described as an *"invaluable"* (Social

housing sector KI) resource for effective homelessness prevention. Despite this, significant barriers were identified to achieving the requisite data sharing protocols and systems. Concerns from criminal justice partners in relation to the 'duty to refer' have already been noted (see chapter four). Difficulties sharing data between DWP and voluntary sector services had necessitated time consuming workarounds to be found to deliver the Trailblazer. Data sharing challenges were also identified between different parts of the local authority. Officers described *"sensitivities"* reflecting *"fear of accusations of a lack of data security"*, but also defended the use of information sharing in homelessness prevention work as clearly adding value and *"not speculative contact"* (Statutory sector KI). As such, they had some confidence that these barriers were *"[not] necessarily insurmountable"* (Statutory sector KI).

With the General Data Protection Regulation coming into force in May 2018, it may well be that this study took place when concerns about data protection and information sharing were at a peak, and local authorities, charities and other organisations in the midst of adjusting to the new regulatory context. One key informant emphasised that *"high level"* action to facilitate data sharing in ways that could support agendas like homelessness prevention was required from Central Government.

Opportunities for service improvement

This section uses qualitative insights from key informants and frontline workers to identify opportunities for service improvement that have not already been highlighted in prior sections.

Mental health support

The lack of effective support for people with mental health problems emerged as a major theme in this study. It was clear to key informants that there were strong links between homelessness risk and mental ill health. Concerns here spanned a wide range of aspects of mental health provision that residents in need struggle to access in the city, including adolescent mental health care; support for people with low-level mental health issues; access to Community Psychiatric Nurses; and access to counselling:

> "the offer generally in the mental health world for adolescent mental health, is extremely poor" (Social housing sector KI)

> "low-level mental health [issues]… we really struggle with people who are telling us that they're depressed or they're anxious… and that's affecting their work… They're off work sick so they're on sickness benefits. I really think, other than saying to somebody, 'Well, you need to approach your doctor and they'll give you support with that and if need be, refer you on to whatever's available', there's just really not a lot else out there." (Social housing sector KI)

Even where mental health practitioners were formally linked in to relevant services there could be challenges utilising this link. This was the case, for instance, with the Community Psychiatric Nurse (CPN) attached to the Housing Advice Centre, who was largely practicing in the community and thus hard to engage on a systematic basis.

There were also concerns raised about the *nature* of mental health services and provision, not just its availability. Highlighted here were the thresholds that residents were required to meet to qualify for mental health support:

"You can't ring up adult social care and say… 'Will you look at working with this person because they're suffering with their mental health?' There just isn't any provision for that. They have to be really quite critical for that to happen." (Social housing sector KI)

"we've got a lot of people who have a need for mental health services who find themselves in particularly the homelessness world, who might not meet the threshold or criteria for support from mental health teams and social workers… That's an ongoing tension." (Statutory sector KI)

This key informant working in the social housing sector was also concerned that mental health services often required proactive engagement from clients, many of whom were vulnerable and not capable of that engagement and drew a contrast between that approach and the more assertive, and persistent approach pursued by housing services:

"the model around access to CPN is very much like you've got to want to engage. You've got to want to go and turn up for the appointments… I might make a housing office appointment but if they don't turn up, we don't just go, 'Oh well, that's it. We're moving on to the next customer.' We try different methods of engagement. We do that in our world but that would not happen in a million years in the mental health world. Something a bit wrong about that!" (Social housing sector KI)

Several key informant highlighted the complexity of mental health provision in terms of organisational structure, the number of professionals individuals could be working with, and the different boundaries of health care and local authority remits, and felt that because of this links between services in the welfare and housing world, and mental health workers are poorly developed: *"I'm not sure we're really scratching the surface"* (Statutory sector KI). While there are some voluntary sector services that provide support in this area, it was clear from key informants that greater provision was needed, both in terms of support provision to individual households but also expertise to advice housing and homelessness services. In the meantime, strained housing support services were reported to struggle to meet these needs: *"as housing providers… We provide support but in a housing function and our offer is generally a general needs tenant, and… whilst we can put a lot of support in, it's still a general needs tenancy"* (Social housing sector KI).

Not 'everyone's business' yet: partnerships and joint working
Despite the city's *'everyone's business'* philosophy and heavily partnership-driven approach, numerous statutory and non-statutory services and organisations were identified as playing an insufficient role in homelessness prevention, including Children's services, social work and social services, health – including GPs and Clinical Commissioning Groups and addictions services and (as seen above) mental health services, education, and offender management/probation.

The most conspicuous and damaging absence in key informants opinion seemed to be health services, though it was acknowledged that this reflected the pressures associated with austerity and budget cuts, as well as a funding model and culture that was ill-suited to partnership working on issues like homelessness:

"the health service… they've chosen not to be involved…. I don't think it's been through lack of engagement, lack of asking from the council's perspective… I suspect the NHS doesn't think it has a role in this… they just don't see it as their responsibility. Unless somebody is paying for

someone to be there, a GP won't turn up… They'd say, 'It's not one of our priorities and we have to make cuts, so we're not going to do it.'" (Third sector KI)

"GPs and CCGs… they feel like they're getting paid for a particular task and it's very timed by the minute and don't often, see their wider role and government really needs to be a lot firmer, I think, about that" (Third sector KI)

Frontline workers voiced frustration that GPs were often unwilling to assist residents by writing letters to support benefit claims without payment (legal aid used to pay for these letters) and explained that claimants were now forced to claim within GP support, making a positive decision less likely.

Particular challenges were identified getting appropriate buy in from all relevant services where individuals have combined mental health and substance misuse issues: *"it's that slight protectionism around oh no, we just do this one thing. We don't deal with the people that have mental health and other issues"* (Statutory sector KI). Frontline workers described such residents as being passed back and forth between addiction, mental health and health services including GPs, with no one willing to take responsibility.

Probation and offender management services were also highlighted as an important absence by multiple key informants, and this was thought to reflect pressures and high case loads within those services as well as major restructures of provision, the effects of which were still being managed:

"offender management, is something that we'll probably struggle to get in-roads…. it's difficult because, particularly around probation, caseloads are going up. I think people feel like they're busy enough. They feel like they're professionals in one area and there's a little bit of a resistance as in 'so now you expect us to be benefits advisors?' which really isn't the message that we're trying to give" (Statutory sector KI)

Links between some departments and services *within* the local authority were also identified as not as robust as they need to be to maximise opportunities for effective homelessness prevention. Several key informants highlighted that links between housing and homelessness services and children's and social services could be stronger, but noted the challenge of pulling social workers away from their statutory obligations to engage with non-statutory homelessness prevention work. Frontline workers and one key informant noted the potential for better links with education. The intention here was not for 'universal' school-based interventions but for targeted advice and support where there are clear signs of risk:

"education they hold a lot of information. So, the ones where persistently children aren't attending, we could perhaps start using that data… does that mean there's other issues going on? Is this likely to lead to homelessness in the future?… all that information, it's data that they've got." (frontline worker, homelessness prevention focus group)

Several participants also identified scope for improving links between housing advice services and the teams managing Council Tax payments and the now localised Council Tax Support scheme, though here concerns around data protection and information sharing were noted (see above). Frontline workers and key informants highlighted that there had been a reduction in the size of the

team administering Council Tax Support linked to budget cuts and that this had made it more difficult for residents to access advice. While online support was available, this does not suit all residents in need. This 'lean' model was seen as a missed opportunity for early intervention: *"Council Tax collection is one of those areas that's suffered a lot of cuts, because it's back office type service. So we adopted lean processes, which means there's less capacity for interaction with residents who've got difficulties, which then puts more pressure on [other] services"* (Statutory sector KI).

Businesses were acknowledged to be an additional set of stakeholders relevant to the homelessness prevention effort in Newcastle. Links here were seen to be in the early stages of development, with the Street Zero initiative a key turning point.

Concerns about the level of partnership working were also raised in relation to the voluntary and charitable sector. One key informant noted the presence of homelessness charities in the city who want to: *"plough their own furrows and not necessarily contribute… just do their own thing"* (Statutory sector KI). A key focus here were organisations distributing free food on the streets. The key informant explained that the local authority's preference was for people sleeping on the street or engaged in other street activity (e.g. begging) to be encouraged to engage with services where there is wider support that looks beyond their nutritional needs. This was seen as challenging, however, given the "*generosity and charitable nature of people who live in Newcastle who want to do something*" (Statutory sector KI).

Questions were also raised about the buy-in and commitment of other charities and housing associations (see below) in the city who were – at least on paper – formally involved in the Active Inclusion Newcastle partnership structures. Our focus group with the city's Advice Compact (see chapter four) suggested that a number of those involved in the Compact worked in relative isolation day-to-say and attended Compact meetings to share information rather than to participate in the more 'muscular' form of strategic alliance to prevent homelessness that the Active Inclusion Newcastle model sought to promote. Key informants recognised that in the case of some charities, austerity and resulting local decisions about how to priorities resources, had damaged relationships and organisations' willingness to engage at a deeper level. Talking about a welfare rights organisation in the city, this statutory sector participant explained: *"they're not really hearts in it, like hearts and minds. They'll come because they don't want to be seen to be not participating but actually they're not very keen on the council because we don't fund them as much as we used to"* (Statutory sector KI).

It is also worth noting here that years of austerity were identified as undermining the effectiveness of the city's network of services in a more diffuse and longer-term sense. Frontline workers in particular emphasised that contractions in services like youth organisations and children's play services had reduced the 'touchpoints' that were seen as vital in the process of preventing homelessness early. Despite compensatory gains to increase the reach of homelessness prevention services and maximise the opportunities for supportive interventions described in detail in chapter four, it was felt that this wider and longer-term trend had inevitably negatively impacted on services capacity to 'nip issues in the bud' early:

> "We've got no Youth Services, we've got no Play Services. We've got very limited opportunities for families to access support outside of our service… people who don't need a lot of intervention but who could just do with some intervention every now and again, [there's] very limited

opportunity [for that] and quite often we don't nip those problems in the bud any more because they don't have the contact with professionals that could've previously just stopped something or… eased a situation. We now see people who are four to six months down the line of a really difficult situation." (frontline worker, advice agencies focus group)

Sitting alongside these comments about the partners that needed to be, but aren't, sufficiently engaged in the homelessness prevention in Newcastle, two voluntary sector key informants involved offered something of a critique of the *local authority's* approach to partnership working and leadership. They emphasised the city council's focus on strong leadership, calling instead for an approach that recognised local organisations as *"equal partners"* involved in a *"two-way process"* of mutual critique and learning in pursuit of *"shared goal[s]"* (Third sector KI). Several examples were given of how this issue manifests, including that the homelessness prevention forum was described as local authority-led, rather than more collaborative: *"[It's] good that Newcastle still has a homeless forum… but… it is so controlled by the local authority. They set the agenda… [talk] about the last quarterly report… and the providers sit there and just listen. It's not really a two-way process. There's no challenge"* (Third sector KI). Another example concerned the local authority's approach to commissioning, which was described as 'top-down' and not allowing providers to adapt and improve services over time based on their experience delivering them. These key informants identified a tension between the local authority's wish to coordinate and maximise the impact of local services and the role and worth of independent organisations' being able to *"do things differently"* calling for *"a bit more humility"* (Third sector KI) on the part of the city council, suggesting that they should see their role more as an 'enabler' than a leader and controller of provision in the city. As noted above, statutory sector key informants justified their leadership role with reference to the electoral mandate of city council members.

Employment support

Key informants identified employment support as an important gap in provision in Newcastle. This reflected that the cumulative impact of welfare cuts and reforms was to make life 'on benefits' extremely difficult to manage for many people, with (decent) employment the only prospect of increasing their income and escaping poverty, and the associated risk of homelessness. This key informant explained:

"probably, [my] biggest regret… is that government didn't seem to put anything into the impact of the transformation from a reduced welfare state to one that is dependent on work to fill up the income gap [for] individuals… The support that exists is fairly small, and tends to be targeted at those closer to the labour market. So for those people furthest from the labour market, there's nothing, and little wonder there's degrees of alienation that people face, and that our offer to them cannot resolve their needs." (Statutory sector KI)

Another key informant agreed, acknowledging the role of Discretionary Housing Payments but highlighting concerns about their sustainability, and seeing increased support in relation to employment as necessary to address these issues:

"I think what you probably would find if you asked the right questions is that, there are entire housing estates who have been subject to bedroom tax, probably benefit cap, all kinds of other impacts… Universal Credit and income shocks in that regard… Entire housing estates being topped up really, by Discretionary Housing Payments and I suppose, in theory, what you'd want is to just have more interventions in getting those families in the council estates, to explore work

and employment. I'm not convinced that happens... I can see why you would use DHP to manage the problem, but it's going to run out eventually. I don't think government will continue to sign that cheque, and if that was reduced markedly, that could have a significant impact" (Third sector KI)

While included here as a 'weakness' in Newcastle's network of homelessness prevention services, this gap in relation to employment could perhaps have been classified as a challenge or limitation to effective homelessness prevention, given that responsibility for employment support rests with DWP and is delivered by Jobcentres and contracted providers. Similar concerns have recently led Tom Pollard (Demos) to argue that responsibility for employment support should be removed from DWP and replaced with some mix of other government departments, local or combined authorities, and charities (Pollard, 2018).

Exclusions from social housing

In chapter three, we saw that despite having a comparatively higher rate of social lets than other core cities and more than double the lettings rate in England overall, there were concerns that access to social housing for some low income, vulnerable and/or complex needs groups was restricted via the use of affordability tests and/or other restrictive allocations practices. This appeared to be an issue for those seeking to access to council homes managed by the ALMO YHN and housing provided by other local housing associations. It should be noted at the outset that this is an issue extending far beyond Newcastle and evident across England (see Fitzpatrick et al, 2019). This voluntary sector key informant explained practice among local social landlords as follows: *"We do get people, 'Oh, well, they've applied but they owe rent arrears from 2004 to the city council,' so therefore unless they recognise that or pay something off it, then you're not going to get onto the waiting list"* (Third sector KI). Frontline workers described in practical terms how these exclusions from social housing can occur, and the close links to welfare reform:

> "before an offer's made to somebody, they'll be asked to do income and expenditure so we can make sure they can afford the tenancy... they'll be graded, like red, amber, green and then we'll pass it back over to say we would recommend that the tenancy goes forward or we wouldn't." (Frontline worker, housing support workers focus group)

> "as long as [prospective tenants are] able to afford the tenancy then we're quite happy to sign up. We've got to remember that as a housing association, we don't really have a duty of care, same as the council, to homeless people but we still do try our best to help people in need." (frontline worker, advice agencies focus group).

As these quotes suggest, social housing providers saw this kind of practice as entirely justified and indeed, framed affordability checks as a form of assistance and homelessness prevention that avoided setting people up to fail:

> "we try to take an approach where prevention starts really, really upstream and what I mean by that is before somebody gets a tenancy. We'll assist customers with affordability checks prior to them getting a tenancy. We'll obviously assist them at the start of tenancy, making sure that the tenancy's set-up correctly... if you do it right in the first place then, obviously, you're not going to have a lot of people presenting further down the line" (Social housing sector KI)

There was no consensus however that these processes were legitimate and justified. Another key informant highlighted the impacts of this kind of practice on the housing options of those with entrenched and complex needs:

"Newcastle doesn't have a housing problem… What it has is a problem of severe entrenched complex needs, and people going around the system without those needs being met and while they're bouncing around various systems, picking up all kinds of reasons that the main housing provider in the city can think of to not give them a tenancy. That might be arrears, that might be various 'offences' and that is really, the main issue… [social landlords] are doing preventative work with people who they've got currently in their tenancies, but that's because they're protecting their own income as a housing provider… [at the same time] affordability checks are there… That's why Newcastle has [something] resembling a housing problem is that, its exclusions." (Third sector KI)

This key informant went on to described how the private rented sector was being used as an interim housing solution in which some residents are expected to demonstrate their capability and reliability as part of an *"agreed pathway into eventually, the social housing that is readily available"*. They felt that a preferable approach would be for social landlords to *"just accept that social part of their title and place those people anyway"* and recommended that a review of social housing allocations was required to resolve these issues, either government-led, or failing that at the local level. They saw reducing this kind of practice as necessary to reduce demand for *"expensive supported accommodation"*.

Barriers to homelessness support

While this report has clearly demonstrated the wide and deep spectrum of services developed in Newcastle to prevent homelessness, and in particular to address early signs of homelessness risk, it has also surfaced ways in which local authority practices create barriers to support for some homeless households, albeit (it should be emphasised) only in ways entirely consistent with the national legislative framework.

A key example here concerns Newcastle's choice to *"rigorously sometimes enforce local connection"* (Third sector KI) rules that enable the local authorities to transfer homeless households without an established connection to the area to an alternative area where such a connection does exist. Whilst it is not clear from this study whether Newcastle City Council deploy local connection rules any more or less than other core cities, two voluntary sector key informants highlighted the impact of this approach on young people (see above) and those sleeping rough specifically. One key informant particularly emphasised the limited support available to those sleeping rough who refuse an offer of 'reconnection'. This relationship between local connection rules and rough sleeping was acknowledged by housing advice workers and key informants within the local authority, albeit that the absolute numbers effected were reportedly small:

"there are two on the street at the moment… One's arrived from [other northern city] and the other one… he's sleeping in a car park… and he's come over from Latvia, was promised work. Obviously got here, there's no employment. They're worried because he's saying he's alcohol dependent. So you're very restricted on what you can do. You can offer food, you can offer Shelter, you know to come in and… cups of tea and get [a] change of clothing and have a shower and things like that in the drop-in but unless someone will go back home, and unless they find

employment. You don't want to see people on the street but you're really limited on what you can do" (frontline worker, homelessness prevention and response focus group)

"Local connection is a reason for people rough sleeping, because our policy position is that we reconnect. We resist some of the pressure from government to ignore the law and to have no regard for local connection, because our political line is we are barely funded to be Newcastle let alone to meet all the needs of the region, and that is something that government would have to do consistently. It seems unfair at times to try and put pressure on particular cities to change policy, but we've got good relationships with the other authorities in the region and… it's a really small numerical issue" (Statutory sector KI)

As can be seen in the last quotation, key informants defended the use of local connection rules in the context a very challenging structural context of limited public funding (e.g. cuts to Supporting People), high levels poverty/disadvantage (see chapter three), and being a relatively service rich city adjacent to other council areas that have reportedly not protected services relevant to these groups. As a third sector key informant described it: *"politically the view is, well, those local authorities who surround us, political decisions to decommission services for their constituents, that's their problem"* (Third sector KI). In this context, it is perhaps not at all surprising that the city council have sought to reconnect those without a local connection. Notwithstanding the trade offs necessitated in this context, one third sector key informant felt that the city should take a more 'enlightened' approach: *"If you're a caring city who want to do the best and be the exemplar and the guiding light, then these are the difficult choices they need to make"*. Specific proposals included working with the 'receiving authority' to give an accommodation offer, offering accommodation and 'recharging it' to the 'home authority', or enabling the household to stay on condition of positive lifestyle changes (desistance from substance use, for instance)[47].

Further examples of barriers impacting specific groups have also surfaced in this report, including: a lack of support for those rough sleeping with a history of violence in supported housing provision (and the small number sleeping rough with dogs); high levels of exclusions from and abandonment of emergency and supported social housing (see chapter four); and finally, claimed differences in the response to homeless households presenting who are well known to services and perceived to be problematic compared to unknown presenters (see above).

Conclusion

There is a cross-sector consensus that Newcastle is a high performing authority in relation to homelessness prevention, something supported by our quantitative analysis of the scale of and trends in homelessness in chapter five. Leadership was identified as the primary enabler of this approach. While national leadership in the early 2000s was recognised as an antecedent of current practice, in the past decade local leadership in managing the challenges associated with national government policies was highlighted as essential in achieving the network of homelessness prevention services we see in Newcastle. Consistent political leadership from elected members was seen as essential in ensuring that homelessness and related budgets could in some cases be protected, relatively speaking, in the face of large-scale funding cuts. Administrative leadership from an ambitious, experienced and knowledgeable team of officers was identified as enabling an innovative and problem-solving approach. Other enablers of the approach were also identified as relevant, including the historic presence of strong third sector organisations in the city, a partnership-

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[47] For an evaluation of domestic reconnection practice in the UK see Johnsen and Jones (2015).

driven approach, and the internal structure of the local authority, which meant that welfare rights and homelessness/housing teams were working to the same corporate objectives.

A number of specific services and interventions were seen to be particularly important and effective in preventing homelessness, including forbearance and support in relation to rent arrears from the city's council housing provider; advice on benefit entitlements and income maximisation, especially unpicking errors in relation to Universal Credit claims; budgeting support; Discretionary Housing Payments; and Alternative Payment Arrangements; 'easements' to Universal Credit/Jobseekers' Allowance-related work search requirements for those experiencing a domestic emergency; and facilitating access to IT equipment and the internet for people to manage their UC claim effectively online. What is striking about this list is the domination of interventions seeking to mitigate the negative impacts on poverty and homelessness of Central Government policies. More positively, Newcastle's work as a Homelessness Prevention Trailblazer authority is perceived to have been extremely positive. The multidisciplinary team has modelled new ways of working proactively and intensively with at risk households and the partnership between the Jobcentre, local authority, YHN and Crisis is widely seen to have radically increased opportunities for supportive interventions to target homelessness risk upstream and pre-crisis.

The study has revealed some very clear messages about the kinds of households and groups less well served by current approaches to homelessness prevention in the city. Particular concern was voiced about single people and single men with limited access to benefit entitlements, fewer routes to support than families, and often also lacking informal support networks. Young people were also a locus of concern given their even lower entitlements to welfare support at a time when they are navigating the transition to adulthood. Some of Newcastle's supported accommodation provision for young people was seen to be too large scale and crisis-oriented and thus falling short of enabling young people to move on into mainstream housing and to address their wider needs. A number of specific migrant groups were also highlighted as facing a series of barriers to effective homelessness prevention, in particular those transitioning from asylum seeker services, European migrants seeking to claim UC and those without recourse to public funds. Challenges were also highlighted identifying private tenants at risk of homelessness before crisis point. The group of most concern, however, were those with complex needs. The City's supported and hostel accommodation was not seen to meet the needs of this group (and indeed to sometimes exacerbate them), with calls made for better access to mainstream housing, the protection of housing support budgets and the scaling up and improvement of Housing First provision.

Efforts to develop homelessness prevention in Newcastle are impacted by a series of challenges, limitations and barriers. Reflecting themes threading throughout this report, welfare reforms combined with cuts to local government budgets were described as creating an environment in which often the best local responses could possibly achieve for households was limited to 'keeping the wolf from the door' and meeting basic subsistence needs, with a life free from financial hardship simply out of reach for some households. Where resources from Central Government were available to enable responses to homelessness, the structure of these was often far from ideal, with funding pots being cash and time limited, subject to fixed cohort restrictions, and focused on crisis responses rather than prevention. Even the Homelessness Reduction Act, agreed to be an extremely positive reform to homelessness legislation in England, was seen to not go far enough in facilitating upstream and cross-sector cross-departmental prevention. Concerns around data protection and information sharing were also highlighted as a barrier to maximising the opportunities for effective prevention.

The final section of this chapter highlighted five weaknesses and gaps in the Newcastle homelessness prevention landscape. The availability of and access to mental health support was identified as a major issue interacting with homelessness risk in the city, with a particular focus on the need to improve support available to those with mental health problems that do not meet clinical thresholds. Despite the city's strong focus on homelessness prevention being 'everyone's business', a great deal of scope was identified for improving partnership working and structures, particularly involving health services, but also addiction, probation and offender management, education, and children's and social services, and local businesses. Buy-in from the voluntary and community sector appears to be uneven, with some tension evident around the role local actors felt the local authority should play in driving partnership approaches. While those within the local authority see a clear moral case – and electoral mandate – for strong leadership, some voluntary sector colleagues call for a more enabling approach that sees third sector organisations as equal partners.

Gaps were also identified in the employment support arena in light of the ever more essential role of employment as a possible route out of poverty given the retracting welfare safety-net. Finally, a series of barriers were identified that act to include specific groups of those experiencing or at risk of homelessness from services. The role of affordability and other background checks in excluding vulnerable and low income households from social housing was seen to be particularly unhelpful from a homelessness prevention perspective. Help to those sleeping rough was also seen to be weakened by the deployment of various practices including use of local connection rules and restrictions on the support available to those with a history of violence in supported accommodation. Eviction from and abandonment of supported and crisis accommodation was identified as another important exclusionary mechanism undermining homelessness prevention efforts in Newcastle. These factors risk undermining the city's ability to achieve its own goal of ending rough sleeping by 2022.

8. The transforming role of the 'local state': concluding discussion and recommendations

In this final chapter, we draw out key conclusions of the study, reflect on the implications of this research for our understanding of the possibilities for, and limits of, the local state in preventing homelessness effectively in the current context, and offer a series of specific recommendations on how homelessness prevention can be further improved in Newcastle.

Newcastle is among the cities very worst affected by local government budget cuts, having faced real cuts of 32% since 2010. Only two core cities (Manchester and Central London) are worst affected. In managing these cuts, homelessness-specific budgets have been protected, seeing a small increase in spending between 2010-18. While the city has seen large cuts to Supporting People budgets, these have been somewhat less severe than in most core cities. Newcastle also features in the top three core cities worst impacted by welfare reform measures in cumulative terms (once again behind Manchester and Central London), amounting to losses of over £2,000 per households since 2010, and was among the earliest cities subject to the roll out of Universal Credit. Newcastle also faces a challenging context in relation to other key measures of destitution, low earnings, and severe and multiple disadvantage compared to other core cities. This impacts of this combination of factors were starkly demonstrated by our interviews with Newcastle residents who had experienced or been at risk of homelessness. They described the impacts of living on often very low incomes – going without food and heating, basic furniture, and struggling to pay for travel.

This is an extremely challenging context for homelessness prevention. Much more positive is the housing market context in Newcastle, which is likely to play a key compensatory roll in the face of these other challenges. The City has private rent levels below those in most other cities and far below the national average, and – crucially – a rate of social lettings double that of most northern core cities and about three times the English average. The protective role of living in social – and in particular council – housing was clear from our interviews with social tenants who'd been at risk or homelessness, and of particular relevance was forbearance in relation to arrears linked to benefit issues that council tenants specifically benefited from. Those residing in the private rented sector often faced tight budgets, lower quality accommodation, and a much more present risk of their tenancy ending than social tenants.

It is in this extraordinarily challenging context that Newcastle has sought to develop a spectrum of approaches to homelessness prevention, beginning at least as far back as the early 2000s and catalysed by Central Government agendas in that decade, but extending right through the 2010s despite the Government's 'light touch' approach during this time (NAO, 2017). The resulting approaches span interventions targeting those at very early risk of homelessness, all the way through to those at imminent risk or already experiencing it, and extend far beyond the city's statutory duties under both pre- and post- Homelessness Reduction Act law. Our analysis of the full range of interventions and services identified the core characteristics of Newcastle's approach as being strongly weighted towards early or 'upstream' prevention, partnership-driven, proactive and persistent, and data and evidence informed.

The scale of homelessness is susceptible to analysis via a range of data sources, and across almost all of these measures, Newcastle has low levels of homelessness. The city records very low absolute levels and rates of statutory homeless acceptances and households in temporary accommodation, and low levels of street homelessness. Using methods more heavily reliant on household surveys to estimate overall 'core homelessness' and thus escaping some of the limitations of administrative data sources, Newcastle also appears to have very low levels of homelessness compared to elsewhere – the lowest of all the core cities in 2017.

Despite having a very low rate of acceptances under homelessness legislation, Newcastle has statutory homeless application and decision levels in the middle/top of the core cities pack. Looking in detail at the statutory data, this appears to be because first, higher numbers of 'not homeless' households apply to the city council as homeless, likely reflecting that the city's ambitious prevention services bring more households into the ambit of the statutory system than elsewhere. Second, the local authority find a comparatively lower proportion of applicants to be in priority need and accept fewer single person households as in priority need as compared to other Northern core cities. This may reflect that more non-priority need households apply as homeless (again reflecting the ambit of the city's prevention services) and/or local variations in interpretation of the priority need test. It must also be borne in mind that those not owed the full statutory duty in Newcastle benefit from a wide array of non-statutory services detailed in this report. Non-priority groups will also now enjoy greater statutory entitlements (to prevention and relief) under the Homelessness Reduction Act.

The headline story in Newcastle then is of a city facing an extremely challenging context, but managing to maintain extremely low and stable levels of homelessness on almost all measures. The most likely combined explanations for this are twofold, with the exact causal contribution made by each hard to decipher definitively.

First, Newcastle's housing market context – characterised by lower private rent levels and much higher social lettings rates – is highly likely to play some level of protective and indeed compensatory role in providing lower income households with comparatively better housing options than in many other core cities. Likely relevant here is that Newcastle retain a sizeable stock of council housing managed by an Arms-Length Management Organisation but with stable and active political leadership steering its strategy and operation. We thus see, for example, high levels of arrears forbearance and support and advice functions funded through the Housing Revenue Account. These factors must of course be weighed against the reported exclusion of the lowest income and most vulnerable households from social housing reported as a concern within this report, though as Fitzpatrick et al (2019) have recently found, this is an issue nationally, not just in Newcastle.

Second, we would argue that the wide spectrum of proactive preventative interventions and support structures in place in the city have played a core role in maintaining low levels of homelessness in spite of the severe challenges of welfare reforms and budget cuts since 2010. Newcastle has consistently been one of the most active authorities in terms of prevention and relief activity since 2009, with a particular focus on financial debt/arrears and benefits advice. Service providers in Newcastle appear to have made very full use of all mechanisms available to mitigate the impacts of welfare reforms and protect residents from homelessness as a result of income shocks, reductions and expenditure hikes linked to those reforms, including Discretionary Housing Payment, Alternative Payment Arrangements, arrears forbearance, and local welfare assistance. An array of city-level protocols and policies have also been developed to seek to avoid homelessness at various known

trigger points for it wherever possible, including when households leave institutions like prisons or hospitals. Newcastle has also been at the forefront of innovations in the homelessness prevention arena, not least through the Homelessness Prevention Trailblazer, via which it has developed a range of ways to identify and support those showing early signs of homelessness risk, including through partnership working, information sharing and 'predictive analytics'. Our interviews with households impacted by homelessness bear out that Newcastle services are managing to reach households at early risk of homelessness – as well as those nearer crisis – and indicate the positive impact of the city's policy and support interventions on people's lives, in particular where local services are able to provide or help residents access timely, tangible financial help and help make someone's financial circumstances more sustainable going forward. Holistic and personalised support from named individuals that were approachable and communicated with people clearly was especially effective and valued by people.

This report thus tells a very positive story about homelessness prevention work and its achievements in Newcastle. Key factors identified as enabling this approach included leadership, both politically from council members with a particular vision for the city and the capacity to protect homelessness budgets, and administratively, from council officers adopting a data and evidence informed model of continuous service development. But efforts to effectively prevent homelessness are constrained by a series of challenges, most notably the limits of current government finance and – at an individual level – welfare entitlements, which mean that the best local services can sometimes achieve is to keep households 'just coping', but still in a position of extreme hardship and insecurity.

Our analysis has highlighted a range of ways in which current homelessness prevention activity could be improved further in Newcastle and these are detailed in the recommendations presented in the next section. These recommendations target a combination of local and national actors, including Newcastle City Council itself, Central Government departments, but also other local actors across the voluntary sector and public sector. This spread of recommendations acknowledges the wide variety of organisations with a role to play in identifying homelessness risk early and mitigating it. In particular, they reflect the foundational role of Central Government in setting the national policy and funding framework in which population level risk of homelessness and local government's capacity to respond to it is shaped.

The current context is particularly pernicious in his regard, with local authority efforts to prevent homelessness directly limited by national policies that increase homelessness risk and restrict local authorities' capacity to respond effectively to it. Welfare reform measures that have made households poorer, and local government budget cuts that have made council's poorer are the key culprits here, but numerous other, smaller and more specific examples of government policy inhibiting more effective homelessness prevention have been given throughout this report. Newcastle City Council, like other local authorities, is fighting homelessness with one hand tied behind its back, making the positive story about trends in and levels of homelessness in the city particularly impressive and emphasising that even in this extremely challenging context a significant and sustained difference can be made by locally-driven approaches, especially within a more enabling housing market context. Nevertheless, while Newcastle has demonstrated impressive capacity to protect residents from homelessness, based on the quantitative and qualitative evidence gathered in this report, in many cases local services are unable to provide residents with the foundations of a stable life in the way the city council wishes to. While there is then scope for locally driven

improvements to homelessness prevention work in Newcastle, the 'local state' will continue to be constrained to a substantial degree until these national-level barriers are removed.

Recommendations for national actors

1. Central Government should review the scale, distribution, and impacts of local authority budget cuts, including on homelessness, homelessness prevention, and housing support services, and recognise the challenges associated with multiple short-term, rigidly structured, and narrowly focused funding pots in compensating for this. Central Government should ensure that local authorities have sufficient and sustainable funds to prevent and alleviate homelessness effectively;

2. Central Government should urgently review the impact of post-2010 welfare reforms on homelessness and homelessness risk, including the benefit cap, bedroom tax, freeze to working age benefits, Local Housing Allowance caps, and Universal Credit, and improve primary prevention measures at the national level by ensuring that social security entitlements cover households' realistic housing costs and enable them to escape poverty and destitution;

3. The Home Office should work with Asylum Accommodation and Support Service providers and the Ministry of Justice with Community Rehabilitation Companies to address barriers inhibiting Newcastle City Council's capacity to prevent homelessness among those leaving asylum accommodation and prison, ensuring that notice of discharge from such institutions is given at least 56 days in advance and that sufficient information is provided to enable an effective response;

4. The Department of Health should work with local health professionals to ensure they play a greater role in homelessness prevention, including enabling General Practitioners and other relevant health professionals to identify early signs of homelessness risk among patients and give timely and affordable support to households applying for benefits on the basis of health needs. The Department of Health should also recognise the potential role of mental health problems in increasing homelessness risk, and support the provision of services working with people with mental health problems (including those falling below clinical intervention thresholds) to reduce homelessness risk;

5. The Department of Education should consider its role in helping to minimise homelessness risk among those leaving education institution;

6. The Department for Work and Pensions should strengthen the employment support offer to improve access to paid work, increase the income those entering work at the bottom end of labour market receive, and help to ensure the sustainability of work. This could involve interventions seeking to increase the demand for paid work opportunities (via childcare provision and other support to un/under-employed households) and the supply of employment opportunities (via work with employers);

7. The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government should review the effectiveness of the Duty to Refer and consider strengthening the scope and nature of obligations on other public agencies to play a role in the early identification of homelessness risk, and the resolution of

homelessness. A wider range of relevant health professionals should be included in the Duty to Refer, including General Practitioners;

8. The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government should consider how to support and encourage local authorities in providing early interventions that seek to prevent homelessness prior to households being at risk within 56 days, alongside their duties under the Homelessness Reduction Act;

9. Central Government and the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government should recognise the valuable potential protective role of social – and specifically council – housing in preventing homelessness and providing households with a secure and affordable home. The supply and management of social housing should be supported accordingly;

10. The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government should conduct a review of social housing allocations, with a focus on access to housing for low income households and those at risk or with previous experience of homelessness;

11. The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government should review the role of the ending of private rented tenancies in precipitating homelessness and seek to strengthen tenant rights to minimise homelessness risk for those residing in private rented accommodation;

12. Central Government should ensure that local authorities have the guidance and expertise they need to share information between and within all relevant public and voluntary sector organisations to facilitate the identification of early signs of homelessness risk, and maximise effective homelessness prevention, in line with the requirements of data protection regulations.

Recommendations for local actors

1. Newcastle City Council should maintain its strong emphasis on early homelessness prevention. Support available to those at more immediate risk and already experiencing homelessness – including episodically and chronically homeless individuals with complex needs – should be strengthened and improved, including via routes identified in the recommendations below;

2. Voluntary sector partners and accommodation providers and Newcastle City Council should improve the quality of congregate crisis and supported accommodation provision to minimise issues of abandonment, eviction and exclusion from these services and maximise positive move-on, with a particular focus on episodically and chronically homeless individuals with complex needs, and including young people's supported accommodation.

3. Newcastle City Council and voluntary sector partners and accommodation providers should review formal and informal criteria influencing access to support and accommodation, including via the city's street outreach team, in particular those relating to local connection rules and reconnection offers, histories of violence in crisis/supported accommodation, and dog ownership, and consider how these practices interact with local efforts to ensure the sustainable prevention and relief of homelessness, and in particular the aim of ending rough sleeping in Newcastle by 2022;

4. Newcastle City Council and voluntary sector crisis and supported accommodation providers should move towards a rapid rehousing approach for single homeless households, including via the expansion of and improvements to the fidelity of Housing First provision in the city for those with complex needs, and more generally by ensuring access to mainstream accommodation with adequate floating support for those residing in temporary, supported or crisis accommodation;

5. Local health professionals (see below), probation/offender management partners, social housing anti-social behaviour teams (in particular relation to joined up working in response to domestic violence and abuse), addiction services, voluntary sector welfare rights and homelessness organisations, and other local partners working with residents at potential risk of homelessness should participate actively in the partnership approach to homelessness prevention currently pursued in Newcastle. Newcastle City Council should (continue to) facilitate and encourage the involvement of these partners;

6. Local health partners should play a greater role in homelessness prevention, with a particular focus on the role of General Practitioners and other relevant health professionals identifying early signs of homelessness risk among patients and giving timely and affordable support to households applying for benefits on the basis of health needs. Local health partners should also recognise the potential role of mental health problems in increasing homelessness risk, and the value of supporting households with mental health problems (including those falling below clinical intervention thresholds) in reducing homelessness risk. Local health partners should provide expertise/advice to non-health services (including social landlords and housing/welfare advice services) where household's health and mental health problems are contributing to homelessness risk;

7. Newcastle City Council should strengthen information sharing and joint working between local authority departments. This study would indicate a particular focus on Children's Services and Council Tax support;

8. Newcastle City Council should consider – based on emerging evidence from H-CLIC statistics – developing new relationships and protocols with higher education institutions to improve the prospects of students leaving such accommodation with nowhere safe to live;

9. Newcastle City Council explore whether it can strengthen the employment support offer to improve residents' access to paid work, increase the income those entering work at the bottom end of labour market receive, and help to ensure the sustainability of that work. This could involve interventions seeking to increase the demand for paid work opportunities (via childcare provision and other support to un/under-employed residents) and the supply of employment opportunities (via work with employers);

10. Newcastle City Council should review social housing allocation practices across the city's providers (Your Homes Newcastle and housing associations), with a view to ensuring the city's high social lettings rates are being leveraged to achieve positive outcomes for those experiencing or at risk of homelessness, with particular attention to social landlord practices excluding households due to affordability concerns, previous rent arrears, offending histories, or for other reasons;

11. Newcastle City Council should protect the provision of face-to-face support for vulnerable residents who struggle to use online or phone-based provision and facilitate positive relationships between households at risk of homelessness and named, approachable frontline workers. Newcastle City Council should also seek to safeguard and strengthen access to IT facilities for those without such access, and support those without the relevant skills to use it;

12. Newcastle City Council should develop mechanisms and protocols to enhance the prevention of homelessness caused by the ending of private rented tenancies, including by building relationships with private landlords, and consider the role of incentives-based approaches to encouraging landlords to help support services identify tenants at risk of homelessness;

13. Newcastle City Council should explore ways to better identify households at risk of homelessness in more 'hidden' situations, including among those living in private tenancies, sofa surfing/staying with friends and family, and or living with a partner but at risk of homelessness linked to violent or non-violent relationship breakdown.

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Appendix: Estimating Core Homelessness methodology

While further details are given in Bramley (2017 and forthcoming), in brief the derivation of these elements is as follows:

- Rough sleeping national estimates are derived from various approaches described in Fitzpatrick et al (2015) based on Supporting People, Multiple Exclusion Homelessness Survey, UK Poverty and Social Exclusion (PSE) Survey, and British Cohort survey (retrospective questions) data. Changes over time are assumed proportional to DCLG/MHCLG Count/Estimate data; local estimates are derived from combination of smoothed Count/Estimate and Chain data, scaled for consistency with national estimates;
- 'Quasi rough sleeping' (people staying in cars/vans, tents, public transport) is a estimated as ratio mark-up of rough sleeping based on Clarke, A. (2016);
- Squatting or staying in non-residential buildings: overall estimated allowance based on disparate sources including English Housing Survey (EHS), Clarke (2016), press reports, London Fire Service. Local estimates are a mark-up on Rough Sleeping, Hostels and Sofa Surfing;
- Hostels: total occupied bed spaces from Homeless Link annual survey of Support for Single Homeless People, with allowance for Shelters and Refuges. Local numbers based on Census Communal Establishments data scaled for consistency SSHP survey;
- Unsuitable Temporary Accommodation: LA annual returns to MHCLG of numbers of households in B&B, nightly-let non-self contained accommodation and 'out of LA area' placements (half of the latter in the case of London boroughs);
- Sofa Surfers: national numbers based on average of EHS and UKHLS (Understanding Society Survey) concealed household groups wanting/expecting to move, excluding non-dependent children of main householder and full time students, who are overcrowded on bedroom standard. Predicted values at local level using regression models calibrated on UKHLS and PSE datasets.