

# Active Inclusion Newcastle – briefing note 2021-22

## Background and context

Active Inclusion Newcastle is a partnership approach developed as part of Newcastle City Council's 2013-16 budget setting process. It responds to the:

- **growth in demand** for financial inclusion and homelessness prevention information, advice and support when resources and certainty are reducing
- **transition residents and organisations need to make to a reduced welfare state**
- **scale of poverty and disadvantage** many Newcastle residents face
- need to **change our culture**, to promote preventative and partnership responses

The Active Inclusion Newcastle partnership approach is guided by our local politicians' values of fairness, inclusion and social justice and contributes to Newcastle City Council's priorities of employment, education and skills, and housing. We do this by providing a framework to improve the coordination and consistency of information, advice and support, helping partners to increase residents' financial inclusion and to prevent homelessness. This is in the context of the Government's welfare reforms, which will affect over 40,000 Newcastle residents and will [reduce income arising from working age benefits in Newcastle by an estimated £119 million annually by 2025-26](#). This is at the same time as [the Council having to save £345 million due to government cuts and increasing cost pressures by 2023](#), and in the context of a pandemic which has compounded the issues residents face by reducing median incomes by 4.5%, changing rules around benefits and housing, and bringing people into the benefits system (residents on Universal Credit increased by 13,385 from March 2020 to April 2021).

The Active Inclusion Newcastle partnership approach is supported by the Council's Active Inclusion Service which provides governance arrangements, policy support and sector leadership to build trust, encourage collaborative working and support compromise. This infrastructure helps us maximise our resources to support residents to maintain the foundations for a stable **life**:

- somewhere to live
- an income
- financial inclusion
- employment opportunities

Many residents face interconnected challenges that cannot be effectively responded to by single services. Since 2013 we have made good progress in promoting the means and benefits of service coordination. We now want to improve service integration, which is difficult when the legislative, financial, information-sharing and support planning frameworks don't yet match our aspirations. We are applying the principles of public service transformation to our partnerships to change culture, behaviours and expectations; making understanding the context we're working in, cooperation and prevention the norm, and crisis the exception. We were supported by the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government to develop [Newcastle's Homelessness Prevention Trailblazer programme](#) to enhance our infrastructure support to those at risk due to their social, financial, health and migration / asylum circumstances, and our commitment to prevention won the [World Habitat Gold Award](#) in 2020. We are helping residents and services to transition to the changing context and aspire for this to be:

- **Practical** – providing partnership approaches to the reduced and changed welfare state
- **Preventative** – making it everyone's business to predict and prevent crisis
- **Problem solving** – considering how people, policies and processes can adapt and support

To do this, the following objectives underpin the Active Inclusion Newcastle partnership approach:

- **Understand the local impact** – based on our context and the life courses, pathways and risk triggers that affect Newcastle residents
- **Segment need** – to provide proportionate, personally relevant and cost-effective responses
- **Align budget processes to support the most vulnerable to prevent crisis** – during 2020-21 we and partners advised 31,466 people on welfare benefits, debt and housing
- **Develop citywide consensus and partnership responses** – 142 services and organisations participate in our [Financial Inclusion Group](#) and [Homelessness Prevention Forum](#). Routinely monitoring and reviewing with partners helps us to understand and show how we use our limited resources to make a positive difference to improve residents' lives and to identify opportunities for improvement and innovation
- **Provide infrastructure support** – information, training and workforce development to help partners who are not specialists in financial inclusion and homelessness prevention to identify risk and act to prevent crisis, rather than just to refer to crisis services
- **Provide [partnerships](#) and [protocols](#)** – agreed ways of working that give consistent governance and practice to increase financial inclusion and prevent homelessness
- **Provide universal information to prevent residents becoming more vulnerable** – including web information visited 125,346 times. Other examples of this information are available online [here](#)
- **Adapt core council directly delivered and commissioned specialist support, care and therapeutic services for residents who are known to be vulnerable** – to enable them to identify and prevent the risk of financial exclusion and homelessness
- **Target support to shield the most vulnerable and to prevent crisis** – from our specialist financial inclusion, homelessness prevention and employment advice and support services. This is supported by the [Newcastle Gateway](#) web-based system which helps to match 23,589 residents with 76 services by 484 staff users
- **Catch residents who are 'not known' to be at risk through open access information and advice services** – learning how we can identify risk and prevent crisis earlier
- **Carry out systematic exception reporting** – to support collective reviews of why we haven't prevented financial exclusion or homelessness, e.g. because of performance, policy, provision or commissioning issues, and problem solving to avoid repeat cases
- **Consider the balance of individual, systemic and structural causes of exclusion**

We aim to create a strong system which supports strong services. This includes the following:

### **Primary prevention activities – 'adapting' core services for vulnerable residents**

We provide support to multi-agency staff and volunteers who work with disadvantaged residents but who are not specialists in housing, welfare benefits, debt or employment. This includes providing resources to help identifying, talking to and responding to residents about these issues to become routine. The following information shows the support provided in 2020-21 for staff and volunteers who are not specialists in financial inclusion and homelessness prevention:

- **Communications and information** – 3,638 people receive our information updates
- **Website** – 125,346 visitors to our webpages for [welfare rights](#), [debt](#) and [homelessness](#)
- **Trigger point conversations** – [information](#) to support councillors, multi-agency staff and volunteers to talk to residents about money, housing and employment issues
- **Spectrum of advice** – 279 people participated in online training
- **Welfare rights and debt consultancy advice** – for 743 staff and volunteers
- **Partnerships and governance** – 142 services and organisations participated in the work of our Financial Inclusion Group and Homelessness Prevention Forum
- **Quarterly forums and published reviews** – led by the Council's Portfolio Holders to create consensus about the impact of the cuts and the effectiveness of our responses for [financial inclusion](#) and [homelessness prevention](#)

## **Secondary prevention activities – ‘targeting’ specialist advice and support**

At the core of our partnership are our specialist information, advice and accommodation services. In 2020-21 these services provided advice to 31,466 people and allocated accommodation and support for 900 households, supporting other services when they need more specialist help. The following data for 2020-21 demonstrates their scale and value:

- **Homelessness and housing** – 4,110 cases of homelessness prevented, no use of bed and breakfast accommodation to meet our statutory homelessness duties since 2006, and 0 evictions from Your Homes Newcastle (YHN)’s 27,000 tenancies. Our challenge is to maintain these low figures post-pandemic
- **Welfare rights** – 20,351 residents supported to secure £25,611,181 of annualised benefit gains. On average, the Council’s advisors each secure over £1 million for residents
- **Debt** – 2,773 residents given advice to provide relief from debt
- **Supporting Independence Scheme** – 597 households awarded resettlement support
- **Employment support** – 379 vulnerable residents supported into employment
- **Affordable credit** – 9,334 Moneywise Credit Union members
- **Support for refugees and asylum seekers** – 391 households given advice and support

We monitor and review the use of these services to identify how we can improve our primary prevention activities and to inform commissioning.

## **Crisis activities – ‘catching’ residents whose crisis we fail to prevent**

These services support residents facing homelessness and destitution when crises haven’t been prevented. This is demonstrated by the following data for 2020-21:

- **Emergency accommodation** – 542 households placed into our temporary accommodation to meet statutory duties and to mitigate crisis
- **Crisis Support Scheme** – 1,359 households provided with emergency food, gas, electricity, clothing or travel support
- **People sleeping rough** – outreach support for 126 people who were found sleeping rough

We use exception reporting and feedback loops to learn from crises to better target our primary and secondary prevention activities, so that we change practice and improve systems.

## **Examples of the positive difference our partnership approach has made**

**Responses to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic** – The pandemic created a rapid and significant shift in working patterns, welfare benefit entitlement and eligibility for housing. In addition, advice services had to move rapidly away from providing face to face advice. To help residents and professionals navigate these changes, we set up website pages on [coronavirus and benefits](#), highlighted local service provision in our weekly emails and [online directory](#), and provided 82 briefings for benefits advisors on the changes. Under the ‘Everyone In directive, we accommodated 46 households with no recourse to public funds who might otherwise have been street homeless, instances of rough sleeping reduced by 90% from March to July 2020, and we established rapid rehousing pathways through an Emergency Housing Panel.

**Building a framework to respond to food poverty** – Tackling food poverty was incorporated into our financial inclusion aims in 2019. Since then, we have set up a Food Poverty Network to coordinate this work. This includes mapping [free, low cost and emergency food provision available in Newcastle](#); securing funding to tackle holiday hunger in [summer 2019](#) and summer 2020; and participating in the Food Support Group with emergency food providers, voluntary and community sector organisations and City Lifeline to support residents during the pandemic. The Food Poverty Network continues to develop opportunities to collaborate, e.g.

using touch and trigger points to help residents to stabilise and build resilience through welfare rights, debt, and housing advice; maximising the value of our collective investment by raising awareness, joint working and securing additional funding to mitigate poverty; and communicating about how responses to food poverty can be used and supported.

**Support for migration, refugee and asylum** – We coordinate a strategic approach to the integration of people migrating, with refugee status and seeking asylum, including managing the Government’s Refugee Resettlement Programme and providing case management support to help residents transition to a stable life when their circumstances change due to their immigration status (leaving the asylum process, refugee family reunification, or experiencing homelessness / destitution as a result of having no recourse to public funds). Our Local Authority Asylum Liaison Officers supported 391 households in 2020-21. We also develop, coordinate and promote Newcastle as a [City of Sanctuary](#), and in June 2021 City Library became the first public library in the region to be awarded Library of Sanctuary status.

**Reducing evictions from council housing** – In 2007 we developed [Sustaining Tenancies guidance](#) with Your Homes Newcastle who manage Newcastle’s council homes. This was to reduce evictions by intervening with advice and support when tenants are at risk of eviction rather than relying on a more expensive and less effective legal based threats process. [This approach has been the main factor in reducing evictions from council housing.](#)

## **Governance arrangements**

At the core of our [Active Inclusion Newcastle partnership arrangements](#) are:

- our quarterly [Financial Inclusion Group](#) seminars chaired by the [Cabinet Member for Inclusive Economy](#), and
- our quarterly [Homelessness Prevention Forum](#) meetings chaired by the [Cabinet Member for Housing and Regulatory Services](#)

We produce quarterly briefing notes for [financial inclusion](#) and [homelessness prevention](#) which collate the data available from partners, helping us to collectively review the challenges we face and the difference we have made, and agree future priorities. However, we know that partnership working doesn’t just happen; it takes political commitment, energy and discipline to create citywide consensus, meaning and purpose that builds trust with residents and partners by improving their experience of our collective resources. We have shown that through cooperation we can maintain the outcomes described earlier despite having to make cuts to our services as a result of austerity. Our data demonstrates the value that a strong system brings in facilitating strong services to work in partnership to meet the challenges of increased demand in the context of reduced resources. Whilst many of the causes of poverty are outside of our control, working together through our Active Inclusion Newcastle partnership is making a positive difference to residents and consolidating this will enable us to continue to do so in increasingly difficult times.

### **More information:**

- [Newcastle's Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy](#)
- [Welfare benefit advice services](#)
- [Debt and money advice services](#)
- [Housing advice services](#)
- [Information for professionals: financial inclusion](#)
- [Information for professionals: homelessness prevention](#)

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