

**Evaluation of Newcastle's 'Cooperative'
Approach to the Prevention and
Management of Homelessness in Light of
Changing Government Policy**

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Contents

Executive Summary	4
Statutory Homelessness Trends: How Does Newcastle Compare to Other Local Authorities?	4
Impact of Changes to Government Policy	5
Strengths of Newcastle's Approach	5
Areas of Possible Weakness.....	6
Hopes and Fears for the Future.....	7
Introduction	9
The Changing Policy Context and Newcastle City Council's Response	11
Statutory Homelessness Trends: How Does Newcastle Compare to Other Local Authorities?	14
Respondents' View of the Impact of Government Changes.....	24
Reduction in Local Authority Funding.....	24
Welfare Reform.....	26
No Second Night Out (NSNO)	27
Housing First	28
Strengths of Newcastle's Approach.....	30
Culture of Prevention.....	31
Partnership Working and the Creation of Active Inclusion Newcastle (AIN).....	33
Relationship between the Council and YHN	35
Services for Young People.....	36
Response to Welfare Reform.....	37
Tyne & Wear Choice-Based Lettings System	40
Cherry Tree View.....	40
Areas of Possible Weakness.....	41
Private Rented Sector (PRS)	41
Changes to the Local Authority's Work with the PRS	41
Role of the PRS in Preventing and Tackling Homelessness.....	42
Potential For the Involvement of Private Landlords.....	43
Evictions from Housing Association Properties	44
Engagement of Mental Health Services in Homeless Prevention.....	44
Provision for Non-Priority Single Men	45
Services for People Leaving Custody	46
Chronically Excluded People and Evictions From Supported Accommodation.....	47
Addressing Complex Needs More Effectively.....	48
Suitability of Hostel Accommodation	49
Employment for Homeless People	50
User Involvement.....	50
Service Gaps.....	50
Hopes / Fears for the Future.....	52
A Holistic Approach and Culture of Prevention	52

Maintaining and Extending Partnership Working.....	53
Commissioning.....	53
Losing Services	55
Collaboration.....	56
Service Standards.....	57
Conclusion.....	59

Executive Summary

Since a previous evaluation was undertaken in 2011, organisations working to prevent and tackle homelessness in Newcastle have faced increasing difficulties, most notably as a result of cuts to public spending and welfare reform. The consensus that emerged from this evaluation was that, despite these difficulties, the local authority continues to provide and co-ordinate high quality services for homeless people and is seeking to develop and improve these services, particularly in areas of perceived weakness. Creative measures are being found to minimise the impact of the more severe cuts to public spending that are imminent, and to ensure that resources are used in the most strategic possible manner, but there are doubts as to whether the current high quality services can be maintained.

Statutory Homelessness Trends: How Does Newcastle Compare to Other Local Authorities?

Recent statutory homelessness trends in Newcastle were compared with those of other local authorities in England, particularly the other 'core' English cities, via analysis of published and unpublished *Homelessness Monitor* data.

While homelessness assessment decisions have risen dramatically in Newcastle over the past four years (as a result of changes in recording practices), the number of households accepted as owed the main statutory duty has fallen from 233 in 2009/10 to 220 in 2012/13. This (gently) falling trend in homelessness acceptances in Newcastle is out of step with patterns in England as a whole, where the overall number of acceptances has been rising steadily since 2009/10. It is likewise at variance with recent experience in most of the other core cities, where homelessness acceptances have generally been growing. The Newcastle trend is, however, consistent with the overall pattern in the North East region, where homelessness acceptances have been falling over the past four years (the only region in England where this is the case).

The number of households in temporary accommodation (TA) in Newcastle is very modest (the snapshot total at the end of March 2013 was 40). The total number of TA placements in Newcastle has been the lowest of all of the core cities at three of the last four financial year ends. The zero recorded usage of B&B in Newcastle is especially encouraging, given the consensus around the unsuitability of this form of TA, particularly for families with children.

The profile of reasons for homelessness in Newcastle broadly matches that of the core city average, and there has been only modest fluctuation in the relative importance of different causes over the past few years. The proportion of acceptances attributable to relationship breakdown has stayed steady, while there has been a modest increase in homelessness associated with exclusions by parents

or other friends and family. Mortgage and rent arrears account for very low numbers of homelessness acceptances in Newcastle, with the latter dropping to zero in the selected quarters studied since 2010/11. The low level of mortgage and rent arrears-related acceptances in Newcastle is in keeping with patterns in both the other core cities and in England as a whole, with the recent recession and housing market downturn having had little apparent impact on these indicators. As elsewhere in England, there appears to have been some recent growth in the importance of loss of private tenancies as a cause of homelessness in Newcastle.

Newcastle registers the second to highest rate of prevention activity of any of the core cities (29.6 prevention actions per 1,000 households). This rate of prevention activity is approximately double that of the core city average and more than three times the rate in England as a whole. One reasonable interpretation of these results would be that effective prevention practice in Newcastle is helping to achieve the low levels of statutory homelessness acceptances and TA placements noted above.

Impact of Changes to Government Policy

Reductions in funding to local authorities have largely been dealt with to date by efficiency savings, both on the part of the local authority itself and the voluntary and community sector (VCS). However, there were concerns expressed about some negative impacts of cuts: the loss of the Tenancy Relations Service, the reductions in face to face contact that was available from the Welfare Rights Service, the lack of money available for capital spending and a perceived reduction in availability of services for people with mental health problems or learning disabilities.

Welfare reform had not yet had an impact on homelessness but was expected to in the future for a range of reasons. A large increase in rent arrears at Your Homes Newcastle (YHN) following the introduction of the bedroom tax was the clearest indicator of future difficulties.

The Government's key initiative in the area of rough sleeping, No Second Night Out, was widely perceived to have had little impact, with the exception of the opportunity to secure funding from the Homeless Transition Fund for a Housing First scheme. Housing First has achieved some impressive early results and appears to be offering a valuable alternative option for some of the most problematic homeless people.

Strengths of Newcastle's Approach

The approach taken in Newcastle continues to be seen as an example for others to follow, both by those who work for the local authority and those who work with it. The strategic approach taken, the relationship between housing and welfare rights, and the relationship between the local authority and the VCS are all seen as areas of strength.

Although there were some concerns expressed by VCS respondents about The Gateway limiting their flexibility, it continues to be regarded as a key element of the culture of prevention. Its role may be developed further with regard to allocating floating support; it is already being used to co-ordinate housing and material support through the Supporting Independence Scheme, although this scheme appears to have received fewer applications than was expected.

Relationships with the VCS continue to be widely regarded as a strength of Newcastle's approach, with faith groups becoming an increasingly important part of the holistic approach being taken to prevent and tackle homelessness. The creation of Active Inclusion Newcastle represents a further step forward in the strategic co-ordination of a wide range of services.

In addition to major political and financial support from Newcastle City Council, services to prevent homelessness continue to benefit from substantial subsidy from YHN, largely as a result of the profitability of its business ventures. The creation by the city council and YHN of the Prevention from Eviction Protocol, now referred to as the Sustaining Tenancy Guidance, continues to be seen as a major driver of the preventative approach being taken in Newcastle, particularly since its adoption within the supported housing sector. In addition, the YHN Young People's Service produces impressive results in terms of enabling young people to remain in the family home, supporting those who do move into their own tenancies to sustain them and reducing the number of evictions of young people from YHN properties. They are also involved in an innovative project to provide intensive support to the most problematic care leavers.

Some respondents expressed a desire for a more co-ordinated response to welfare reform. However, in the case of the change that may have the greatest impact within the city – the bedroom tax – it is clear that YHN has sought to offer a wide range of options to try to alleviate the impact.

Other positive elements of provision within Newcastle were the Tyne and Wear choice based letting system, which was reported to be working well for homeless people and the move of the temporary accommodation to Cherry Tree View, where the improved physical environment was seen as a factor that reduced the vulnerability of the people who stay there.

Areas of Possible Weakness

The work with private landlords was one of the greatest areas of change in recent years and also one where there was most disagreement about the potential for future development. The Private Rented Service becoming part of the Fairer Housing Unit and re-locating to the civic centre was seen to have benefits for tenants but to have damaged relationships with landlords, although steps were being taken to tackle this

difficulty and the number of properties being offered by landlords was building back up. Efforts to improve the quality of properties offered by private landlords were seen as having some disadvantages, because they could increase the time taken for properties to become available.

Perceived barriers to an increased role for the private rented sector in tackling homelessness were cuts to benefits, the greater attractiveness of other potential tenants and the fundamentally different approach to letting to the one taken by social landlords. However, some respondents pointed to the diversity of private landlords and noted the success of Housing First and workers at Cherry Tree View in engaging with the private rented sector. All agreed, however, that financial incentives must continue to be offered for private landlords to engage with homeless people.

There were a number of linked possible areas of weakness with regard to single homeless men, particularly those with complex needs. Limited engagement of mental health services with homeless people continued to be seen as a difficulty, with housing organisations providing mental health training or employing their own mental health specialists seen as possible solutions. An increase in evictions from supported accommodation was a major area of concern and it was acknowledged that there was a group of people who moved between different forms of emergency accommodation. The more efficient allocation of resources was seen to have resulted in some of the most difficult people being concentrated in emergency accommodation, where there were particular problems associated with addictions.

While there was an acknowledgement by respondents that the issues affecting this group of people were very complex, there were a number of measures that were being taken to try to address these linked difficulties. The creation of a traffic lights system to assess the readiness of people to move on from temporary/supported accommodation, and the holding of meetings between providers of supported and permanent housing, seemed particularly positive developments in relation to ensuring that single homeless people move on at the most appropriate time. The Common Case Management Group is another initiative designed to ensure that there is a strategic and co-ordinated approach to meeting the needs of the most chaotic people. Although work is still at an early stage, there were differing opinions about the likely impact of measures to provide more effective housing support to people who were leaving prison.

Hopes and Fears for the Future

Severe impending funding cuts were naturally a major concern for all respondents. While there was a consensus that Newcastle was starting from a very strong position, there were differing views as to how far services, and the culture of prevention, would be affected by these cuts. The local authority is seeking to maximise its limited resources by establishing contracts that are based around key

groups, rather than forms of provision, with the implication that organisations will need to form consortia in order to bid for these contracts. This will require an acceleration of the move away from competition and towards collaboration, although fears were expressed that it may be difficult for smaller organisations and more specialist forms of provision to be maintained under this new system.

Introduction

In 2011, research by Heriot-Watt and Northumbria Universities highlighted the effectiveness of the holistic and preventative approach being taken in the area of homelessness by Newcastle City Council (NCC), Your Homes Newcastle (YHN) and other agencies working to prevent and tackle homelessness in Newcastle. Evidence of the effectiveness of services was drawn from both statutory and voluntary sector key respondents in the city, and statistical trend data obtained for areas such as statutory homelessness acceptances, homelessness prevention activity, repeat homelessness, social housing evictions and tenancy sustainment.

Factors which were noted to have contributed to the establishment of a 'culture of homelessness prevention', evolving since the Homelessness Act 2002, included: a strong strategic partnership between NCC and YHN; senior-level commitment to the prevention agenda; an emphasis on partnership working with voluntary sector providers and housing associations in the city; and effective deployment of a strong evidence base in developing preventative options and service commissioning.

Specific factors that were identified as being strengths within Newcastle were:

- a strong emphasis on managing debt and rent arrears, including rigorous implementation of a Prevention from Eviction Protocol (PEP);
- the commissioning of a range of support services for those at risk of losing their tenancies, including Advice and Support Workers and Family Intervention Projects;
- the commissioning of a Young People's Service, offering wide-ranging support to 16-25 year olds, as well as a bespoke route through the statutory system for 16 and 17 year olds;
- a 'Gateway' system which controlled access to all temporary and supported accommodation in the city, linked to a 'Pathway to Independence' protocol which monitored move on to more independent living; and
- intensive case management of rough sleepers and others in extreme crisis, including the appointment of 'Lead Practitioners' who act as named contacts within the local authority for the most complex and chronically excluded cases.

This report discusses the findings of a follow up study, conducted in 2013, which once again evaluated the 'cooperative' approach being taken in Newcastle, but in a changed political and economic environment; most notably linked to the impacts of austerity measures. The study sought to address a number of questions:

- i) How have services being delivered by statutory and voluntary providers changed as a result of greater financial pressures and what has been the impact for service users? What changes are anticipated in the future?
- ii) Have the strengths identified by the previous study – such as the holistic approach to prevention and the co-operation between agencies – been maintained in the face of increasing financial pressures?

- iii) What has been, or will be, the impact of greater unemployment and cuts to benefits?
- iv) What measures are being taken to reduce the impact of benefit cuts and how effective are they proving?
- v) How does the performance of Newcastle City Council compare to those of other local authorities, as measured by the *Homelessness Monitor*¹?

The last of these questions was addressed via analysis of published and unpublished *Homelessness Monitor* data (comparing statutory homelessness trends in Newcastle with those in other core cities and to England as a whole²). The first four questions were examined through semi-structured interviews conducted with six members of staff of the local authority, two members of staff from Your Homes Newcastle (YHN) and three staff of NGOs working in the city.

¹ The *Homelessness Monitor* is a five year study (2011-2015) providing an independent analysis of the impact on homelessness of recent economic and policy developments in the UK. It is jointly funded by Crisis and the Joseph Rowntree Foundation. The annual *Homelessness Monitor* reports for each of the UK nations can be accessed at <http://www.crisis.org.uk/pages/homelessnessmonitor.html>

² It should be noted that the main source used here is the 'P1E data' on statutory homelessness returns made by local authorities to DCLG. This dataset has a range of limitations: it comprises only summary 'headcount' information rather than individual case records; only very basic data is collected on issues such as the causes of homelessness; and the main focus is on those households accepted as owed the main statutory duty. P1E nonetheless provides the only large-scale national source of data available on statutory homelessness in England, and enables the position in Newcastle to be compared with trends across the country in terms of a range of key indicators.

The Changing Policy Context and Newcastle City Council's Response

The national and local policy context within which NCC, YHN and other agencies now operate is radically different from that at the time of conducting the initial evaluation in October 2011. While the Coalition Government had been elected into power, wholesale changes with respect to policy-making, public spending and the welfare system were yet to be fully implemented. Deficit reduction is at the heart of the economic policy of the current government, who argue that the state of the UK's public finances pose a greater threat to economic recovery than cuts in spending. In a bid to reduce the deficit, local authorities have been subject to successive annual budget cuts, which have significantly affected their capacity to support local communities and the nature and range of services that they can deliver. In addition, the removal of ring fences around specific budgets (most notably, the Supporting People (SP) budget) means there are no longer dedicated streams of funding in key priority areas. This means that some sectors could be more significantly affected by the cuts than others³.

Newcastle's 2011 Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) highlighted elements of the policy context that were likely to be particularly challenging for the city. These were:

- Welfare reform.
- Economic downturn, leading to redundancies, repossessions and reduced mortgage availability.
- Public sector cuts, particularly to the Council's directly delivered services and the Supporting People budget.

The JSNA also noted two policy changes where the impact might not be so clearly negative. The *Health and Social Care Bill 2011* (as it was at the time of the JSNA) was considered to potentially provide opportunities to better align services to meet multiple needs. In addition, the *Localism Bill* and the power to discharge the homelessness duty through private rented assured shorthold tenancies was seen as a potentially beneficial development, but only if landlords could be attracted and rents were affordable. Subsequently, the *Localism Act* was passed in November 2011 and has resulted in the devolution of a number of decision-making powers from central government to local authorities and communities across a range of local public services. Localism represents a radically new way of working for local authorities, with a shift from the interpretation and implementation of national policy to the development of local policy. This was reported by one respondent of the present study to be a 'huge change'.

³ Despite the ending of the ring fence around the Supporting People budget, the phrases 'Supporting People funding' and 'Supporting People budget' will continue to be used in this report to discuss the financing of commissioned housing related support services.

The *Welfare Reform Act*, passed in March 2012, legislated for the biggest changes to the welfare system for over 60 years; introducing a wide range of reforms. These reforms were claimed to make the benefits and tax credits systems fairer and simpler and to make work the most financially attractive option for households. The measures introduced aimed to save around £18 billion from the national annual welfare bill by 2018.

Welfare reform presents a particularly difficult challenge in Newcastle. It is estimated that changes to the welfare system will impact on around 36,000 households in Newcastle, with a loss of around £102 million from the local economy. The losses predicted from specific measures are shown in the table below:

Benefit Cut	Number of affected households	Newcastle loss £m
Council Tax Benefits	21,600	£2.8
Disability Benefits		£5.52
Employment Support Allowance (ESA)		£9.02
Housing Benefits reductions		£9.06
• <i>Under-Occupation</i>	7,000	£5
Benefit Cap	120-130	£0.26
Child Benefit		£10.86
Tax Credits (TC)		£20.24
RPI to CPI indexing change		£26.02
Reduction in uprating to 1%		£19.64

The benefit changes are expected to have a direct impact on the financial hardship experienced by low income and vulnerable households and will test the financial and social resilience of affected households.

The findings of a recent study looking at the likely impacts of welfare reform in the North East, identified mixed levels of optimism from local respondents about the financial resilience of households affected, which they suggested will be proportionate to their levels of 'vulnerability'. One respondent undertaking prevention work with low income families said that such households are often '*incredibly good at managing their money because they need to be*', but other respondents were less optimistic. One working in the area of financial inclusion reported that '*many of the clients accessing credit unions cannot make money last a fortnight*'; another working with chronically excluded people suggested that individuals' primary needs typically prevent them from being able to manage their finances effectively. The interviews also revealed concerns about the impacts of welfare reform on community and social resilience, with some households becoming excluded from public life; no longer having access to informal sources of support and struggling to access formal support services. Explanations for the concerns drew on a range of factors including: on-line systems, monthly payments, moving home, living in temporary or unstable accommodation, and travel costs (Jarvis et al, 2013).

Focusing specifically on the area of homelessness, Newcastle's 2011 JSNA argued that the possible risks of impending welfare reforms and cuts to local authority funding were:

- Increasing temporary accommodation costs while waiting for the local authority to discharge its statutory duty.
- An increase in demand as homelessness becomes the only or preferred route into housing.
- An increase in legal challenges in the manner to which statutory duties are fulfilled.
- Pressure on community cohesion.

NCC's response to welfare reform has focused on developing a considered, consistent and coordinated approach to internal and external partners' activity to: understand the scope of the changes; understand the role of Government, the Council and partners in responding; help affected households to stay in their homes (and where this is not possible to prevent homelessness); help affected households to secure employment, maximise their incomes and reduce their expenditure; and develop systems that fairly distribute the limited discretionary funding that Government has provided to manage the transitions. To oversee this response, the Council has established a Welfare Reform Board comprised representatives from across the Council, YHN, Newcastle Council for Voluntary Service (NCVS) and Job Centre Plus.

At a practical level, the steps taken by the Council to respond to welfare reform have consisted of five key elements:

- Coordination, planning and communications (assessing and understanding the impact of reforms; raising awareness amongst residents and partners of the changes and of their options for responding; and producing agreed consistent messages)
- Enhancing co-operative partnerships and targeting support (supporting and developing partnerships to enhance joined up responses, and reduce duplication and confusion; building partnerships with internal and external agencies to raise awareness and develop agreed responses; and targeting specialist advice services on those who are most vulnerable)
- Adapting existing services to ensure they respond to the welfare reforms
- Developing projects to respond to new demands (e.g. changes to the funding of public housing, the localisation of the Social Fund and Council Tax)
- Monitoring and evaluating the cumulative impact of these actions

Another change initiated by the government since the time of the previous report is the No Second Night Out initiative (NSNO). Changes that have been initiated at a local level include the creation of Active Inclusion Newcastle (AIN), the local authority's temporary accommodation moving from Hill Court to Cherry Tree View, the Private Rented Service becoming part of the Fairer Housing Unit and the Cyrenians obtaining funding for a Housing First scheme. All of these changes are discussed in the following sections. But first we review statistical information which compares trends in statutory homelessness in Newcastle with those in the other English 'core cities', the North East region, and England as whole.

Statutory Homelessness Trends: How Does Newcastle Compare to Other Local Authorities?

In this statistical section of the report, we begin by focusing on how trends in statutory homelessness decisions and acceptances in Newcastle compare to those of the other core cities in England, and to England as a whole. We then move on to consider how Newcastle compares to other local authorities with respect to temporary accommodation (TA) placements and the immediate causes of homelessness for those accepted as owed the main duty. Throughout this analysis we focus on trends over the past four financial years (2009/10 to 2012/13). It is important to bear in mind that, with regard to the comparisons with the other core cities, it is the trends over time and percentages that are in the main comparable, rather than the absolute numbers, given the varying scale of these cities (with Birmingham the largest of the core cities, and Newcastle the smallest).

As shown in Table 1, total homelessness assessment decisions in Newcastle have risen considerably over the past four years, more than trebling since 2009/10. As Table 2 indicates, there is a much more mixed picture amongst the other core cities, with this indicator rising in some cities (such as Leeds and Manchester) but falling in others (such as Liverpool and Nottingham). Moreover, while there has been an overall rise in the number of homelessness decisions in both the North East region and in England as a whole since 2009/10, the scale of the percentage increase in both cases is far outstripped by the trend in Newcastle. This transformation in the Newcastle figures is so extreme as to be indicative of a major change in recording practices. In fact, NCC have explained that it is attributable mainly to a change in counting method. NCC's interpretation of DCLG guidance had been that they should seek to resolve cases without taking homelessness applications when the resolution would not require a statutory acceptance. They subsequently decided to revert to their previous position of assessing all applications under the statutory framework. The commencement of the formal recording of telephone and email inquiries related to homelessness also contributed to the upward shift in the figures below.

Table 1. Homelessness assessments and acceptances

Assessment decisions - Newcastle

	Acceptances	Intentionally homeless	Non priority	Not homeless	Ineligible	Total decisions
2009/10	233	13	6	160	4	416
2010/11	231	8	318	405	20	982
2011/12	204	11	522	585	30	1,352
2012/13	220	10	533	633	31	1,427

Table 2. Assessment decisions – comparison with other core cities

	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13
Birmingham	5,123	8,499	6,989	6,664
Bristol	343	266	349	391
Leeds	2,805	4,402	4,548	4,877
Liverpool	886	610	676	532
Manchester	1,273	2,503	2,382	2,537
Newcastle	416	982	1,352	1,427
Nottingham City	761	711	816	632
Sheffield	2,137	3,080	3,632	3,263
North East	3,710	4,370	4,669	4,702
England	89,120	102,200	108,720	113,260

However, as is also evident from Table 1, this sharp rise in the number of homelessness assessment decisions has not been matched by a corresponding increase in the number of households accepted by NCC as owed the main homelessness duty. In fact, the number of homelessness acceptances in Newcastle has fallen, albeit modestly and somewhat inconsistently, from 233 in 2009/10 to 220 in 2012/13. This discrepancy is accounted for by the rise in the number of homeless applicants found not to be in priority need in the period under study (from 6 in 2009/10 to 533 by 2012/13), and to a somewhat lesser extent the rise in the numbers found not to be homeless (increasing from 160 to 633 over the same period). As noted above, changes in recording practices account for these patterns.

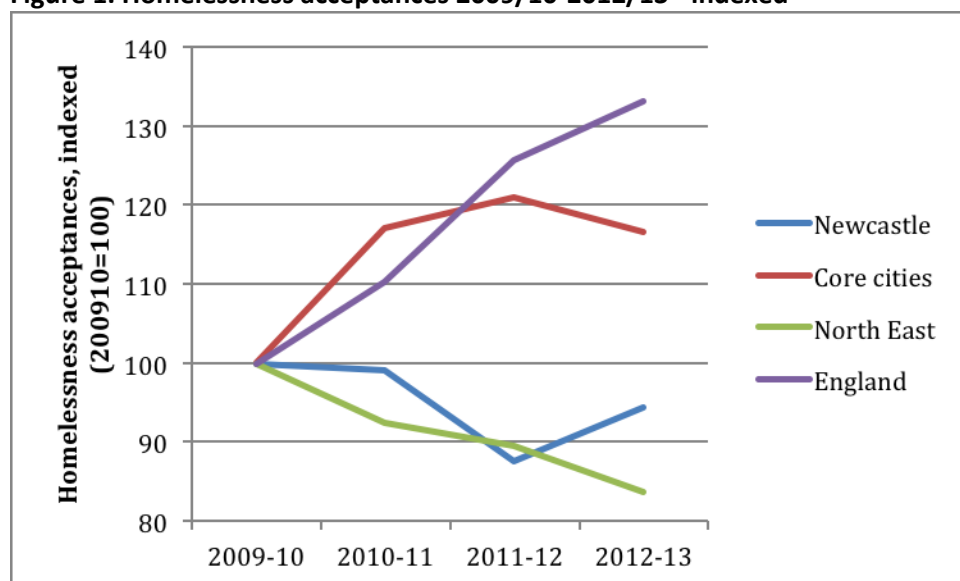
Table 3. Acceptances – comparison with other core cities

	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13
Birmingham	3,371	4,207	3,929	3,957
Bristol	285	214	299	324
Leeds	427	553	697	762
Liverpool	233	218	268	187
Manchester	482	643	580	533
Newcastle	233	231	204	220
Nottingham City	616	578	617	481
Sheffield	946	1,070	1,383	1,218
North East	2,007	1,857	1,797	1,679
England	40,020	44,159	50,290	53,325

As Table 3 above indicates, this (gently) falling trend in homelessness acceptances in Newcastle is out of step with patterns in England as a whole, where the overall number of acceptances has been rising steadily since 2009/10. It is likewise at variance with recent experience in most of the other core cities, where homelessness acceptances have generally been growing (with the exception of

Liverpool and Nottingham, where there is also a broadly downward trajectory). The pattern in Newcastle is, however, consistent with the overall trend in the North East region, where homelessness acceptances have been falling over the past four years (the only region in England where this is the case, See Table 5.5, *The Homelessness Monitor: England, 2012*⁴). Figure 1 captures these trends graphically, demonstrating the divergent trend between Newcastle and the North East region on the one hand, and the rest of England and the core cities (taken as a whole) on the other.

Figure 1. Homelessness acceptances 2009/10-2012/13 - indexed



Moving on now to the use of TA in Newcastle, Table 4 captures a snapshot of the total number of TA placements in the city at the end of each of the last four financial years. It is immediately apparent here that a) the numbers of such placements in Newcastle are modest, and b) most TA placements are in social housing stock. There is an upward shift evident in the last financial year, but this is from a very low base.

Table 4. Newcastle TA placements

	B&B etc	Hostels	Leased	Other private landlord	LA/HA own stock	Other	Total
31-Mar-10	0	2	0	0	27	0	29
31-Mar-11	0	6	0	0	20	0	26
31-Mar-12	0	6	0	0	20	0	26
31-Mar-13	0	9	0	0	31	0	40

The zero recorded usage of B&B in Newcastle is especially encouraging, given the consensus around the unsuitability of this form of TA, particularly for families with children. With respect to the other core cities, as Table 5 indicates, Nottingham and

⁴ <http://www.crisis.org.uk/pages/homelessnessmonitor.html>

Liverpool have likewise recorded zero placements in B&B at the end of each of the last four financial years, and in most of the other core cities the use of B&B has declined very substantially, with only Birmingham still reporting any significant usage by March 2013 (and even here usage is only a third of what it was in March 2010).

Table 5. B&B placements – comparison with other core cities

	31-Mar-10	31-Mar-11	31-Mar-12	31-Mar-13
Birmingham	136	70	57	39
Bristol	13	1	5	4
Leeds	0	0	11	0
Liverpool	0	0	0	0
Manchester	23	22	45	2
Newcastle	0	0	0	0
Nottingham City	0	0	0	0
Sheffield	70	10	1	2

Turning now to total TA placements, we can see from Table 6 that Newcastle also compares well with the other benchmark core cities in this respect. The number of homeless households in TA has been lower in Newcastle than in all of the other core cities for three out of the last four financial year ends (albeit that it should be borne in mind that the varying sizes of these cities is not taken into account in these absolute numbers). Again, Liverpool and Nottingham are closest to Newcastle in performance, also with relatively small numbers of households in TA, and by 2013 the number of households in TA in Leeds was only slightly higher than that in Newcastle. The number of homeless households in TA is considerably higher in the other core cities, especially Birmingham.

Table 6. Total TA placements – comparison with other core cities

	31-Mar-10	31-Mar-11	31-Mar-12	31-Mar-13
Birmingham	709	726	691	708
Bristol	207	158	160	137
Leeds	59	115	132	48
Liverpool	71	46	31	19
Manchester	265	276	371	286
Newcastle	29	30	26	40
Nottingham City	76	89	87	24
Sheffield	277	191	168	106

The next area that we considered was the reasons for statutory homelessness. Note that, for logistical reasons, this part of the analysis focuses on data from selected quarters.

As can be seen in Table 7, the proportionate distribution of immediate reasons for homelessness in Newcastle broadly matches that of the core city average. There is therefore nothing in this table that suggests that Newcastle is unusual with respect to the relative importance of different causes of statutory homelessness.

Table 7. Homelessness acceptances in Newcastle and comparator cities, by reasons for homelessness - % of acceptances in Q4 2012-13

	Parental exclusion	Other friends or rels	Relationship breakdown	Mortgage arrears	Rent arrears	Loss of AST	Other loss of rented	Other	Total
Birmingham	16	14	28	2	3	15	5	17	100
Bristol	20	13	12	5	0	30	1	18	100
Leeds	11	17	13	3	4	9	9	34	100
Liverpool	16	3	22	0	11	3	3	43	100
Manchester	7	12	51	5	1	2	8	15	100
Newcastle	17	18	20	5	0	15	12	13	100
Nottingham	20	11	17	1	3	30	1	16	100
Sheffield	24	15	28	0	1	9	6	16	100
All core cities	17	14	27	2	2	14	6	19	100

It is apparent from the aggregated overview provided in Figure 2, that there has been only modest fluctuation in the relative importance of different reasons for statutory homelessness in Newcastle over the past few years (see Table 8 for a more detailed breakdown of these trends in causes, in terms of both absolute numbers and proportions). The proportion of acceptances attributable to relationship breakdown has stayed steady, while there has been a modest increase in homelessness associated with exclusions by parents or other friends and family. Mortgage and rent arrears account for very low numbers of homelessness acceptances, with the latter dropping to zero in the selected quarters studied since 2010/11. This excellent outcome on rent arrears supports the positive findings in the qualitative sections of this report about the effectiveness of the eviction prevention work undertaken by YHN and NCC. At the same time, it should be noted that rent arrears also account for only a low proportion of homelessness acceptances in most core cities (with the exception of Liverpool, see Table 7), and in England as a whole (see Table 5.7(b) *The Homelessness Monitor: England, 2012*).

The low levels of mortgage arrears-related acceptances in Newcastle is also in keeping with patterns in both the other core cities (Table 7) and in England as a whole (Table 5.7(b) *The Homelessness Monitor: England, 2012*⁵). While this finding might seem surprising in the context of the recent recession and housing market downturn (albeit that the increase in mortgage repossessions has been far less marked than in the 1990s recession), qualitative evidence gathered for the *Homelessness Monitor* suggests that most repossessed households manage to avoid statutory homelessness by finding their own solutions via family and friends, or by securing a private tenancy.

It appears that there has been some increase in the relative importance of loss of a private tenancy as a cause of homelessness in Newcastle. This is also very much in keeping with developments at the national level in England, where there has been a very large growth in both the number and proportion of homelessness acceptances associated with the ending of ASTs⁶. While the increasing importance of loss of private tenancies as a cause of homelessness has affected all regions of England, it has been particularly marked in London and the South, with a more moderate upward trend reported in the North and Midlands.

⁵ <http://www.crisis.org.uk/pages/homelessnessmonitor.html>

⁶ <http://www.crisis.org.uk/pages/homelessnessmonitor.html>

Figure 2: Immediate causes of statutory homelessness in Newcastle (aggregated categories)

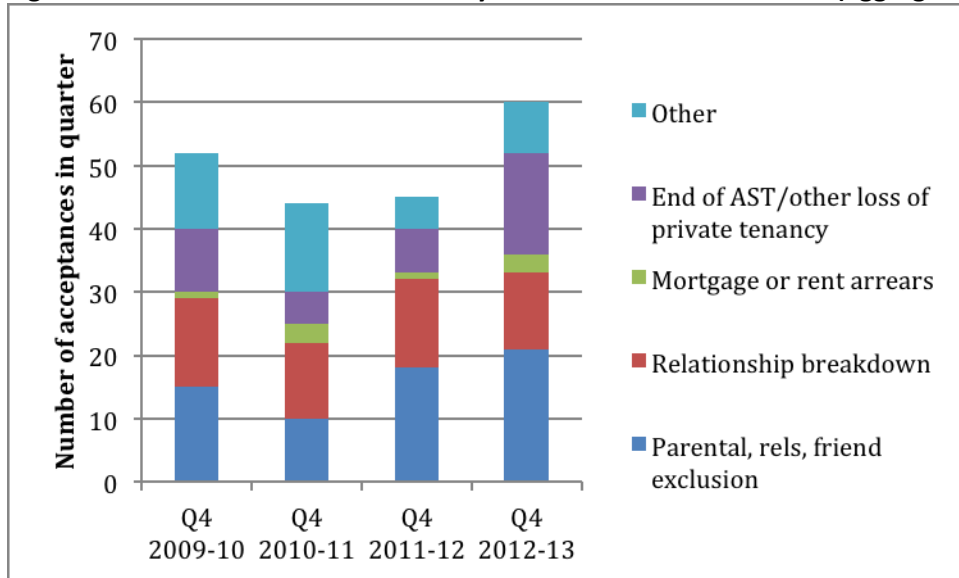


Table 8. Homelessness acceptances in Newcastle, by reason for homelessness

(a) numbers

	Parental exclusion	Other friends or rels	Relationship breakdown	Mortgage arrears	Rent arrears	Loss of AST	Other loss of rented	Other	Total
Q4 2009-10	10	5	14	0	1	7	3	12	52
Q4 2010-11	5	5	12	3	0	1	4	14	44
Q4 2011-12	14	4	14	1	0	5	2	5	45
Q4 2012-13	10	11	12	3	0	9	7	8	60

(b) percentages

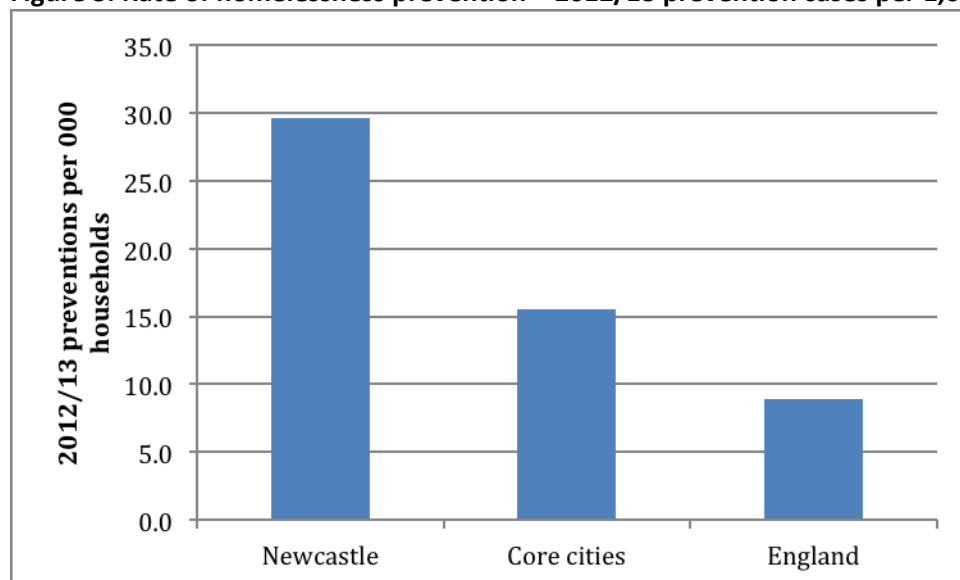
	Parental exclusion	Other friends or rels	Relationship breakdown	Mortgage arrears	Rent arrears	Loss of AST	Other loss of rented	Other	Total
Q4 2009-10	19	10	27	0	2	13	6	23	100
Q4 2010-11	11	11	27	7	0	2	9	32	100
Q4 2011-12	31	9	31	2	0	11	4	11	100
Q4 2012-13	17	18	20	5	0	15	12	13	100

Finally, we reviewed homelessness prevention activity in Newcastle, in comparison with the other core cities. As can be seen below, in Table 9, Newcastle registers the second to highest rate of prevention activity of any of the core cities (29.6 prevention actions per 1,000 households), bettered only by Nottingham (at 31.3 actions per 1,000 households). Figure 3 demonstrates that this rate of prevention activity is not only approximately double that of the core city average, but more than three times the rate in England as a whole.

Table 9. Homelessness prevention actions in 2012/13 – Newcastle and comparator cities

	Helped to remain in existing accom	Helped to access new accom	Homelessness relieved through positive action	Total cases of prevention and relief	Household population (000s)	Preventions per 000 households
Birmingham	3,514	3,682	131	7,327	420	17.4
Bristol	1,767	1,713	2	3,482	199	17.5
Leeds	1,643	1,261	137	3,041	359	8.5
Liverpool	309	933	46	1,288	198	6.5
Manchester	4,182	1,044	119	5,345	217	24.6
Newcastle	1,776	1,389	508	3,673	124	29.6
Nottingham	2,041	2,142	130	4,313	138	31.3
Sheffield	458	203	229	890	242	3.7

Figure 3. Rate of homelessness prevention – 2012/13 prevention cases per 1,000 households



The notable feature to emerge from Table 9 above about the profile of Newcastle's prevention activities is that these are much more heavily weighted towards 'homelessness relieved through positive action' than is the case any of the other core cities, with the exception of Sheffield where the overall rate of homelessness prevention activity is low. NCC have explained that these 'homelessness relief' cases relate mainly to people moving into supported accommodation. It would be interesting to learn more about how these

differences in the balance of prevention activities manifest in practice on the ground. Nonetheless, a reasonable interpretation of these overall statistical results would be that effective prevention practice in Newcastle is helping to achieve the low levels of statutory homelessness acceptances and TA placements discussed above.

Respondents' View of the Impact of Government Changes

Reduction in Local Authority Funding

NCC has been subject to an overall budget cut of 40% over the past three years. These cuts were reported by a number of local authority respondents to have made a 'significant difference' to the administration and delivery of Council services. The focus of the Council's response to date has been the identification of internal efficiency savings, which have been manifested in the form of staff redundancies, reduced pay awards for staff, the rationalisation of office spaces and the restructuring of services. Of the parts of the local authority discussed in this report, only the Housing Advice Centre (HAC) was reported to have lost a specific service – the Tenancy Relations Service (discussed further below), as well as operational capacity.

Broadly speaking, local authority respondents reported that their services continue to offer the same types of provision to service users, albeit in a different form. However, respondents suggested that reductions in capacity within teams are putting staff under increasing pressure, particularly within the context of increased demand. One said, for example: *'it's been happening over the last 12/18 months that they're reducing services and that puts more pressure on the ones that are left'*. Concern was expressed that the loss of staff, increased workloads and the restructuring of services have (in some cases) hindered informal and personal relationships that often underpinned the effective co-ordination of services. As one respondent explained:

'We've lost a lot of personal contact, because obviously people have left and changed, so those one-to-one relationships that you had with people have been changed or fractured...and people are busier because they've lost staff so it's harder to maintain those relationships. And I think a lot of the work that we did was down to those relationships. Things like meeting times have got shorter and not everybody can attend meetings because they're so busy, and that's made the work a lot harder. So although the services may have slightly changed, the biggest difference has been around those personal relationships'.

To take one example of the re-structuring of a service, over the past two years, the Welfare Rights Service has seen its staffing base reduce by 40%, mainly due to the loss of short-term funding for specialist posts. A number of advice and support branches have closed and the service has been re-developed based on a 'triage' system. Face-to-face support continues to be provided to client referred from statutory services (such as adult social care, mental health services and children's services) and to self-referrers aged 65 and over. Where clients do not meet these criteria (primarily, self-referrers of working age), their enquiries are now filtered via a telephone advice line. The service has also increased the range of self-help resources available to clients, reduced the number of outreach sessions held in communities and limited the provision of specialist support, such as tribunal support. These changes have led to some tensions and had mixed impacts on service users. For example, one respondent reported instances of members of the public presenting at offices demanding face-to-face appointments, which has proved difficult for some staff to manage. In addition, they reported that a number of staff felt uncomfortable about what they

perceived to be the service refusing to offer specialist support to those in need and expressed concerns about de-skilling workers by limiting the amount of specialist support that they were able to offer. Nonetheless, the introduction of new ways of working – principally, the introduction of a triage system for non-priority self-referrals – was reported to have had a positive effect on the efficacy of support offered to some clients, with up to 50% of enquiries reported to be successfully dealt with at the initial point of contact.

One respondent noted that the re-structuring of the welfare right service had happened at a time when alternative sources of advice and support were also being cut. For example, the CAB is under pressure and has lost some of its specialist support services.

Moving to another area of particular relevance to preventing and tackling homelessness, the ring fence has been taken away from the Supporting People (SP) budget and it was cut by £6 million in 2012-13. Several respondents highlighted that a small part of this reduction had been compensated for by central government through the establishment of regional budgets to address single homelessness. They reported this to be a positive initiative in respect of partnership working and service developments but noted that a budget of £1 million to be spent across the region was very small in the context of the overall losses to SP funding.

Reductions to the SP budget were reported by local authority respondents to have had a limited effect on the provision of accommodation and support service for homeless client groups to date. Importantly, no bed spaces have been lost and the same range of accommodation and support services continue to be delivered. However, the end of the Government's Places of Change programme has severely limited capital improvements, with the development of Cherry Tree View being a notable exception (see later section).

Similarly, Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) respondents reported few changes to the delivery of frontline services as a result of SP cuts, because of the work undertaken with the local authority over recent years to identify opportunities for efficiency savings. One local authority respondent confirmed:

'In terms of our Supporting People budget, that has gone down significantly and we have had to work with providers in terms of getting efficiencies out of the system and we have managed to do that with no reduction in terms of frontline support'.

Similarly, a VCS respondent reported that *'the local authority have been really responsible in terms of how they've managed what have been severe cuts'*. In terms of their service provision, they went on to report:

'There's been changes...in terms of doing the same or doing more for less, and reviewing in terms of how we work...There's some things that we probably don't do as much of as what we previously did, but we work with external agencies, or we have replaced that money with grant funding. So in terms of our core services, in terms of the accommodation and the buildings, they're all still remaining, and we've retained our floating support projects as well'.

Despite this largely positive picture, one local authority and one VCS respondent reported that public spending cuts in other policy areas were having a knock-on effect on homeless services, particularly with respect to people with mental health and learning difficulties. They suggested that the lower threshold for homeless support compared to other types of

support were resulting in the primary need of these groups being identified as homelessness, with the consequences of emergency accommodation spaces being dominated by people with severe mental health problems who might have little prospect of achieving independence, reduced throughput in the system and increased demand for services.

Welfare Reform

Welfare reform was seen to have a number of actual and potential impacts, with the points made very much in keeping with the qualitative evidence gathered by *The Homelessness Monitor* in England, particularly in other parts of the North and Midlands⁷.

Respondents reported seeing increases in the number of service users being sanctioned under the stricter conditionality requirements for job-related benefits, a tougher approach to work capability assessments and more people being found fit for work. In these instances, clients were being referred to Newcastle Futures for additional employment related support because, as noted above, the Welfare Rights Service is no longer able to support all clients to appeal their fit-for-work decision.

There was widespread agreement among respondents that the limited financial resources of households were likely to result in an increase in rent arrears and evictions, with consequent increases in homelessness. Furthermore, extreme financial stress is known to be associated with a number of wider social problems including heightened rates of relationship breakdown, domestic violence, emotional distress, substance misuse, mental health problems and self-harm; all of which are known 'triggers' for homelessness⁸. One local authority respondent reported, '*it's hard to imagine that there won't be a fallout that will create homelessness*', while one VCS respondent noted that:

'We have a 3-stage approach (emergency, stabilisation and progression)...we are getting people to the end bit and the welfare reforms are going to take them straight back to the emergency stage and we will have to pick them up again...and that's the bit that the public purse isn't realising yet...some people are going to become a lot more marginalised and in need of a lot of support'.

Another local authority respondent expressed concern that welfare reforms, in light of the limited labour market in the North East and higher thresholds for some types of support, will create a perverse incentive for individuals to align themselves to particular vulnerabilities in order to receive support. They explained:

'For us, it's that link to work and lack of work. People will fit themselves into the categories where there is money...there will be perverse incentives for people to align themselves to be homeless, or having chronic drug use or...as they have more chance of getting money or support if they are tied to those worlds and they can't get jobs'.

There was also concern among respondents about the potential impacts of welfare reform on the degree of 'churn' and indeed 'blockages' within the housing market as a number of

⁷ *The Homelessness Monitor* series, <http://www.crisis.org.uk/pages/homelessnessmonitor.html>

⁸ *The Homelessness Monitor* series, <http://www.crisis.org.uk/pages/homelessnessmonitor.html>

housing options become less available. In the social housing sector, there is a shortage of smaller properties, meanwhile larger properties are expected to become harder to let as a result of the bedroom tax, which will impact on the sustainability of communities. Furthermore, the need for people who are under-occupying to move into smaller accommodation is likely to substantially reduce the amount of one bedroomed, social rented accommodation available for single homeless people.

At the point of interview, few respondents reported seeing an increase in homelessness as a result of welfare reform but suggested that the true impacts of the changes are unlikely to become apparent in the future. One local authority respondent stated:

'I think it's too early to say just yet...but I do think maybe the next few months we will start to see an impact...it's going to come and I'm sure that there is going to be an increase in homelessness through this, especially around the bedroom tax.'

One VCS respondent agreed:

'The compound impacts may not occur for 2 or 3 years...a lot of the research that we have done has found that you don't see the increases in homelessness until 18 months or so later.'

However, one early impact was an increase in social housing rent arrears. YHN reported rises in rent arrears of approximately £100,000 in the first six week following the introduction of the bedroom tax. This was described as 'really worrying'. In addition, the bedroom tax was causing difficulties in matching people to properties: *'there were plenty of two bedroom properties available in Walker, for example, but it would only be feasible for single people to live in them if they were prepared to share'*.

No Second Night Out (NSNO)

NSNO is a central government initiative, launched in December 2012, with the fundamental aim of ensuring that no one 'new to the streets' should spend more than one night rough sleeping. As such, it differentiates between new and more entrenched rough sleepers. Those who meet the criteria of NSNO are to receive an offer of accommodation, outside of the homeless sector, with the aim being that people are diverted away from the system. Respondents were universally sceptical about the impact of NSNO in Newcastle given the nature of the rough sleeping population and the quality of the existing 'offer' for rough sleepers, with one respondent describing NSNO as a 'big white elephant' and another suggesting it as a 'red herring', as 'lots of energy and effort went into something that really wasn't going to address what our main problem is'. Another evaluation was:

'Everybody focused in many ways on the first principle, which is obviously somebody not spending a second night out. I think where it's more applicable to Newcastle, is nobody should return to the streets, and I think that's where we've certainly focused our efforts. We don't have massive numbers of people hitting the streets for the first time.'

Similar points about the questionable applicability of the NSNO approach outside of London were also made in first edition of *The Homeless Monitor*⁹. In addition, one local authority respondent suggested that it had produced a flurry of reports which were confusing and focused on people already known to the local authority. However, one positive element of NSNO in the Newcastle context was the opportunity for the city to secure Homeless Transition funding for the development of a 'Housing First' scheme, which is being run by the Cyrenians.

Housing First

Housing First was designed to address one of the central paradoxes of traditional homelessness provision, as noted by one respondent: 'It's one of the ironies of society's response to the people who've got anti-social lifestyles that we make them all live communally'.

At the time of this report, 37 people had been supported through the Housing First model. These individuals are known to the chronic exclusion team, have previously failed to live in supported accommodation and have previously presented difficulties in terms of engagement with services.

Housing First was cited by both local authority and VCS respondents as one of the most significant developments in the city since the initial evaluation. Its benefits were identified as two-fold: firstly it provides an alternative and effective means of supporting the most chronically excluded people in the city to sustain accommodation and regain a level of stability in their lives. Secondly, it increases the private-rented accommodation options available to homeless client groups.

Discussing the success of the model to date, one VCS respondent stated:

'Currently we've got 100% retention rate, which is remarkable. Most of the individuals we've got in now are past the six month period. So we're not talking about years' worth of stability and sustainment, but certainly as a key performance indicator, it's a statement ... We've got some guys who we never ever thought we would get off the street'.

A local authority respondent was similarly positive:

'I think that's a really interesting model and from what I can gather is, it has been successful...I think for some private tenants it is appropriate for them to go in, but it's critical to have that individual intensive support, because there are some very complex people who it's not appropriate for them to go into the private rented sector accommodation without [support]. They've managed to engage with private landlords who are willing to co-operate with that model, which is excellent. That's the message we're getting back from landlords who do engage with this sector - they're willing to take people who are complex, but it is dependent on support'.

⁹ See *The Homelessness Monitor, Year 1: Establishing the Baseline*, <http://www.crisis.org.uk/pages/homelessnessmonitor.html>

Another local authority respondent praised Housing First because it did not involve 'cherry picking': the selection of clients was agreed by Move on panels and others involved in rough sleeping work.

Key factors that were thought to contribute to the early indicators of success for the project were the employment of workers who have experience of rough sleeping themselves, so were well equipped to engage with the service users, and the careful assessment of whether homeless individuals were more suited to traditional pathways through homelessness or the Housing First model. However, respondents acknowledged that there would be a need to refine the model in the light of experience and of longer term evaluation:

'The HTF was kind of the best chance that we have had to pilot something very different for that client group and it is relative early days, I think we need to refine it and continue to refine it as we are learning about working with the private landlords and dealing with the individuals who are now placed in tenancies, but that has been a brilliant opportunity, and the early signs are that this is something that we want to build on'.

Respondents were keen to see the Housing First model rolled out to a wider group of vulnerable people, suggesting that intensive support for people who move on is a service gap in the city (an issue that is discussed further below). It should be noted that these promising early results for Housing First in Newcastle are consistent with the very positive outcomes reported from Housing First-style initiatives in a range of European cities in the recent *Housing First Europe* project¹⁰.

¹⁰ <http://www.socialstyrelsen.dk/housingfirsteurope>

Strengths of Newcastle's Approach

The overall opinion, among both staff of the local authority and others, was that the approach to preventing and tackling homelessness in Newcastle remained highly effective, despite the difficult context in which services were being provided. Individual members of local authority staff were praised by respondents from other organisations for their expertise, vision, knowledge and skills. Services in Newcastle were seen as superior to other areas with non-local authority respondents commenting:

'I firmly believe that things really, really work well in Newcastle and I think it's sad that 30 years down the line that it's still not national'.

'It remains way ahead of the game in terms of other local authorities in the North East, there's no doubt about that. They are good and they are very well intentioned'.

'Certainly in comparison with other North East authorities, they stand out'.

In particular, there was widespread praise for the strategic approach that was being taken in Newcastle, both from those working for the local authority and those working in partnership with it. The elements of the strategic approach that were singled out for specific praise were: the focus on active inclusion (by three respondents, one of whom was from outside the authority), the links with the welfare right service (on the part of two respondents working for the local authority) and the links with the VCS (by one respondent from the sector and two from the local authority). Other aspects selected for praise by individual respondents were:

- The homelessness strategy, which was thought to reflect the alignment of high level commissioning, partnership and budget concerns with front line services that respond quickly to individual needs.
- A commitment to understanding the reasons for homelessness and using this understanding to inform commissioning and to develop opportunities;
- Clarity on the roles of partners based on citywide protocols. These described the working arrangements and were related to regular meetings that agreed delivery to meet individual need. They were also used to refine the evidence base and commissioning process.
- A life course approach based on encouraging predictive interventions at the earliest opportunity, e.g. work with those leaving prison, care or hospital.
- A long term approach e.g. the promotion of debt advice over the previous four years through city plasma screens and promotional material.
- A consensual approach with agreement reached between different agencies on appropriate reason for eviction, for example. This was reflected in common assessment and verification processes, most notably through the Gateway.
- The commitment to finding the most appropriate housing solution for service users at the first point of contact with the homeless services and the adoption of this 'first contact' approach where other professionals, such as debt advisors and health workers, become aware of homelessness.
- Providing high quality services to respond to crises – e.g. at Cherry Tree View – but also using crises as an opportunity to develop further opportunities for prevention.

- Developing individuals' resilience and long term sustainability, e.g. by providing training, employment and recovery opportunities and encouraging individuals to become part of the community
- The production of statistics that provide information both about broad trends and individual households. Checking that these statistics were consistent with the experience of people providing services.
- The case management of the most complex homelessness cases.
- The future needs assessment leading to a focus on multiple exclusion rather than just homelessness.
- An approach that saw an application as homeless as a last resort.
- Political commitment to protect services to the most vulnerable people.

Other specific elements of Newcastle's approach that were identified as strengths are discussed in more detail below.

Culture of Prevention

In the 2011 evaluation, there was unanimity across all local authority respondents that Newcastle had a strong culture of homeless prevention, which had engendered a more proactive and flexible way of working, and a commitment to partnerships. From YHN's perspective, there was also widespread agreement – from senior management to frontline officers – that there had been a profound cultural change over time, which, through the PEP for example, had shifted the focus from 'enforcing' to 'sustaining' tenancies. The positive culture of prevention was also said to extend to the voluntary sector, which had also been made accountable for averting crises and moving people on through the SP commissioning framework. This cultural change was felt to be achieved by political support from elected members, dedicated resources, the appointment of staff with realistic, pro-active attitudes and the energetic commitment of the Housing and Welfare Rights Services Manager. The culture was said to be underpinned by an evidence-led approach which formed the basis of the SP commissioning and contract compliance process pursued in the city. It was also central to the development of the 'Gateway' and 'Pathway' frameworks and the changing nature of supported and temporary accommodation use in the city. However, a key question raised by the original study was the extent to which Newcastle would be able to sustain a culture of prevention in light of significant financial pressures.

The current study showed that both local authority and VCS respondents believed that the answer was that, to date, Newcastle had been successful in maintaining a culture of prevention. A number of respondents praised the on-going commitment of the local authority to the management and prevention of homelessness, as evidenced by the protection (or 'informal' ring fence) of the SP budget as far as possible, the commitment to partnership and efforts to improve the commissioning and coordination of homeless services. One respondent said of the continuing commitment to prevention:

'I think it's remained in the right place in spite of everything that's went on if that makes sense....[in] a period where the person that you were talking to the week before is no longer there you know, and it must be hard to work in that environment, but I don't think they've let that affect what's going on'.

All of the positive developments in Newcastle identified as contributing to its culture of prevention in the 2011 evaluation remain and, in some cases, were reported to have developed and become more integral to Newcastle's approach. The role of the Gateway was identified as particularly important in an environment of greater demand for services, with limited capacity to meet needs. When talking about the role of the Gateway in the efficient allocation of supported accommodation in Newcastle, one respondent noted that almost all relevant agencies now used the system, which provides a key advantage of 'cutting out the middle man'. Other respondents identified the value of the Gateway for allocating resources effectively at the level of the individual homeless person – 'I think Gateway has evolved to be able to better meet the presented needs' - and at a strategic level:

'We have moved to a more...strategic approach to the allocation of resources...particularly in the allocation of housing resources. So the introduction of the Gateway means we've got a much greater kind of knowledge of the client group who claim to be in need of those services than we ever had before and we're able to kind of track much better the needs of the clients going into services and their pathways through them...I think it was quite a long process to get people to be happy to share that level of information with us and we need to kind of keep on maintaining those kind of links so that people continue to support what we're doing. But I think having that kind of evidence-based approach to allocation of resources and ultimately to commissioning – I think people understand that that does make sense'.

Nonetheless, some minor reservations were expressed about the operation of the Gateway system. One VCS respondent had concerns about the exclusive role of the Gateway in the allocation of supported accommodation, the reservation of bed spaces and re-let times for empty beds, saying:

'One of the key things that probably mitigates against effectively dealing with homelessness, to some extent, is the exclusivity of the Gateway – having to have everyone go through Gateway, where you have some people who simply don't want to engage with the local authority for a range of reasons – often because they owe the local authority money. I would like to see the Gateway as being 'A' point of access to supported housing rather than 'THE' point of access. I would like people to be able to go to [a provider] and then to feed that person in. They can do the monitoring but that person doesn't need to jump through that extra hoop'.

Another VCS respondent suggested that the flexibility of the Gateway system for individual clients could be improved further:

'It's still probably not flexible enough in terms of how much choice somebody has in terms of where they live and where they want to start on that progression. It is about the capacity of being able to meet a need, but at the same time having the flexibility to offer a more personalised approach – that's something that we need to look at'.

However, a local authority respondent suggested that the role of the Gateway should be expanded further and that a weakness was that it was only used to allocate supported housing and not floating support. One area where the Gateway has increased its role is in relation to the 'Supporting Independence Scheme' – the locally administered scheme that

has replaced the national Social Fund previously operated by the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP). As one respondent explained:

'That's all being handled through the Newcastle Gateway, so we're using it as an allocations tool for the financial resources as well now. One big departure from the DWP offer is that we want people to be linked in with support because we think that gives them the best chance of actually maintaining independence. We don't want to just kind of go, 'Okay, right there's a cooker' – problem solved. We assume that there may be other issues'.

A concern about the scheme is that there have been fewer applicants than expected. One respondent suggested that there were three possible reasons for this: the scheme being cashless, the limit to the number of times that people can apply and people not knowing how to apply. However, despite the difficulties, the opportunity to combine housing and financial help was seen as a positive development:

'It is hard because this is something we have never done before, but it is an opportunity and it has been really interesting to tie that into our commissioned services...so the initial analysis bit was that most people who got the community care grant were either leaving an institution or leaving some of our commissioned services for moving on into the community, so to tie that all together has been a brilliant opportunity'.

Partnership Working and the Creation of Active Inclusion Newcastle (AIN)

The strength of partnership working in Newcastle (both within the local authority and between NCC, YHN and other providers) was identified as a key factor in the successful prevention and management of homelessness in the 2011 evaluation. Both local authority and VCS respondents agreed that relationships between agencies were good and the partnerships were effective, with all parties being aware of the rationale behind the commissioning process and the need to work together to find effective solutions for homeless (or potentially homeless) people.

Although it was noted earlier that there were concerns over factors such as shorter meeting times, agencies were continuing to work effectively together. As one respondent put it:

'... it is really challenging times at the moment but there does seem to be a commitment there from everybody to work together, and I do think that's one of the strengths of Newcastle compared to some of the other authorities. Don't get me wrong – it has been quite difficult with the cuts, and obviously there's the cuts coming next year with SP. But what's interesting is that we're sort of involving everybody in discussing it, and getting everybody else's views on what we can do differently'.

Since 2011, the local authority has sought to further improve the co-ordination and alignment of its services, with the creation of Active Inclusion Newcastle (AIN) being cited as a particularly positive development within the city by a number of local authority and VCS respondents. AIN is a delivery model that aims to coordinate the provision of consistent information, advice and support services to help people to achieve stability in respect of income, freedom from excessive debt, somewhere to live and employment opportunities. It also seeks to take a positive approach to the targeting of information, advice and support. It is based on the Council and over 30 partner agencies working

cooperatively to help reduce inequality and disadvantage through prevention services, emergency responses and targeted support to avoid repeat crisis. It is important to note that this is not a new way of working in Newcastle; rather AIN aims to build on and enhance existing, successful joint-working arrangements (such as the prevention of homelessness through debt advice, increasing incomes through targeted benefits advice and increasing access to affordable credit) and to co-ordinate services in a more wide-ranging way.

In April 2013, AIN listed the achievements of partnership working that it was seeking to build on as:

- Prevention of homelessness through Debt Advice – in 2011/2 a range of partners provided debt advice that prevented 620 cases of homelessness.
- Increasing incomes through targeted benefits advice - in 2011/12 the Welfare Rights Service helped 9,234 people secure £19,149,304 of benefits.
- Increasing access to affordable credit – the Council provided Moneywise Credit Union with funding that helped an additional 208 people a quarter to access affordable credit.
- Reducing evictions through targeted support – the Sustaining Tenancies Guidance (formerly PEP, discussed further below) has helped to focus support and reduced evictions by over 100 per year.
- Prevention of homelessness through advice and support – there were 3,798 cases in 2011/12, achieved by a range of partners providing advice and alternatives that prevented the household becoming homeless.
- Reducing multiple exclusion by increasing access to independent housing –for example, through the Housing First initiative.

The number of cases of prevention represented a small increase on the 3,603 in 2010-11.

One respondent described AIN's role in the following terms:

'drawing together all of those different nebulous work-streams and trying to make our role – while still focussed on alleviating homelessness and the worst kind of impact of poverty – a more holistic and preventative approach to stopping crisis before it gets to the stage where someone's knocking on the door of the Housing Advice Centre saying they have nowhere to stay'.

Another respondent similarly linked the AIN to tackling homelessness in a holistic manner: *'I think it's that holistic approach that the Active Inclusion Unit can provide...we need to make sure that we are making the best use of our resources'.*

The physical co-location of the AIN and Money Matters teams within the same building as the homelessness section was further reported by one respondent to have aided the alignment of services. They explained:

'As far as I'm concerned, any family who is presenting as homeless, there's an affordability problem. So, it's a huge change, but it's a good change for us, that we work as partners and we look at not just the housing, but the financial side of it. It's still early days, but it's all really positive...And then with the changes with the welfare reform, I think it's the best thing that could've happened, having five specialist debt advisers in your team'.

Commenting on AIN, one VCS respondent stated: *'I think the ethos of it is absolutely right. I think it's kind of the logical progression of the good work that the authority have done'*.

Speaking more generally, one respondent pointed to the advantages of partnerships relying on systems rather than only on relationships between individuals: *'... it is never good to have these things resting solely on relationships, it does need to be process and system based'*. This seemed a particularly important point, given the frequent changing of personnel and roles that was noted above.

Faith groups were now increasingly being seen as partners in preventing and tackling homelessness:

'The other thing which I have noticed, more over the last 12 to 18 months - the faith based services and the churches are becoming more and more involved, so they have got more prominent...I would say up until about 12 to 18 months ago, we did have communications with the churches but they were never that actively involved, whereas the last 12 to 18 months they have got, quite clearly, a bigger role and they are seeing more of our people. They are obviously very interested in what help and support has been given'.

'Because of the welfare reform cuts, people are turning more to the churches. It was interesting when I started to go to the church to see one of my clients; it was interesting how many rough sleepers would be in the church. And just starting to talk to the priest, the information that they have – you realise that we're not really utilising that'.

So relationships with faith groups appears to be one area where joint working could be developed further.

Relationship between the Council and YHN

One partnership that is particularly important in the provision of services to homeless people is the one between the local authority and YHN. A member of staff of YHN suggested that, in addition to providing good services, joint working in order to prevent homelessness saved both parties the costs of (for example) families being placed in bed and breakfast hotels and children being taken into care. An Audit Commission report in 2004 had been critical of YHN in the area of support and care to communities, so support and care became one of YHN's strategic objectives. YHN is able to provide a high level of service because a number of services are subsidised through its other business ventures and because it is the only Registered Social Landlord (RSL) operating in Newcastle which is solely focused on the city. Two examples of services where there is substantial funding provided by both the city council and YHN is the support provided by Advice and Support Workers and the Young People's Service (YPS, discussed further below) to YHN tenants. The local authority currently provides approximately £1.7 million of funding for these services from the former Supporting People budget, but a further £1 million is provided by YHN.

The YPS is an example of a service that is believed to be unique to Arm's Length Management Organisations (ALMOS); it has eliminated the situation where 16-17 year olds were automatically accepted as statutorily homeless and offered a property without support. YHN prevents homelessness both by keeping people in their home where possible and by

ensuring swift support through the allocations system where somebody does lose their home.

The approach of YHN and the local authority in relation to evictions is a particularly important element of homelessness provision. The PEP was introduced in 2005, reviewed in 2009 and 2012 and is now called 'The Sustaining Tenancies Guidance.' One member of YHN staff described the advantages of this approach:

'Our staff now know, and have known for years, that they cannot get repossession of a property unless they follow that guidance and can demonstrate that they've followed it. The courts know that we've got that guidance there, so they are expecting us to have followed that guidance. Hence when we go for possession at courts, and we go for lots, we are not questioned by the judge because they know that we've got this guidance that we follow. We do get questioned by the defence, the tenant you know if they turn up with a solicitor or whatever, but all we have to do is demonstrate, 'Here is all the things that we've done', and then we'll get the possession. But we go to court not just to throw someone out, it's to get them, it's to get an order on it to say, 'Well this is your last chance' you know, and we've been incredibly successful in reducing the number of evictions, and that's got to be a major, major part of it.'

This positive view of the approach taken to preventing evictions was shared by one local authority respondent, who said:

'And what YHN do is they have a flagging system, so if someone's come through the homeless route there's a flag, and they know that if things aren't right they need to be making contact. And I have to take my hat off to them, to be honest. The amount of evictions is really small, and I know that they exhaust everything before they take someone to court to be evicted. The expectation is that on the application there'll be a flag, and they'll do their six-week check. If there's no housing benefit, if there's concerns around rent arrears, then they'll either contact us, or whoever the provider was that referred them in – whoever is involved; it's usually the advice and support worker who is attached to that housing office. And they'll send them out, and they'll want to know what's going on, maybe if they're involved with Probation, whoever, just try and have a meeting, look at what we can do.'

Quarterly meetings between the homelessness section and YHN's Heads of Service to discuss people at risk of eviction were another important element of the approach. One local authority respondent noted the impact of the PEP, not only in reducing evictions from YHN stock, but also in spreading this approach to the supported housing sector. Another commented that the level of evictions in Newcastle was the lowest for all of the core cities, which facilitated a high level of scrutiny of individual cases to drive specific improvements in practice.

Services for Young People

It was noted that there had been little change in the scale and causes of youth homelessness in Newcastle in recent years; relationship breakdown with family remains the predominant cause. However, family mediation services successfully support a number of young people to return to the family home. The majority of young people referred through

the Homelessness Prevention Unit stay at home rather than making a homelessness application. This is one of a number of statistics that the YPS can quote to demonstrate the effectiveness of its services: others are that evictions of 16-25 year olds from YHN property fell from 33 two years ago to 21 last year, 97% of those supported in an independent tenancy were still in the same tenancy a year later and 2000 hours of volunteering work have been undertaken by young people supported by the YPS.

The YPS is one of the services that YHN subsidises from other parts of its work. It employs over 50 staff and fulfils a wide range of contracts with the local authority; some of which involve working with private sector tenants and some of which are exclusively with YHN property, such as the block of flats at North Kenton. One weakness that was acknowledged in the provision of the YPS was that some 16-25 year olds have YHN tenancies and do not come to the attention of the YPS unless they are referred because they are at risk of eviction.

However, the overall assessment of the service provided was very positive among respondents. One member of staff of the local authority gave the following evaluation of the work undertaken by the Young People's Service: *'I think overall the YHN young people's service works incredibly well with us. Our statutory homelessness is really low ...'*

The YPS are involved in an innovative new project within Newcastle to assess the readiness of young people in care for independent living through their Pathway Plan and to provide intensive housing-related support to those assessed as being in the greatest need. This target group for this project were described by one respondent as:

'a niche of clients, not the general care leavers who are quite, a lot of them very savvy young people, who kind of know their way around the system and actually get quite a lot of support from different bodies, including their key Social Workers, but these are picking up the ones who fail, significantly fail, and then we always end up picking them up, two three, four years later. And there are still challenges doing that, it's not quite working. I don't think the system as a whole is picking up all of them quick enough'

Response to Welfare Reform

As suggested above, one of the key aspects of the local authority's response to welfare reform is the greater coordination of services. As one respondent put it, *'We co-ordinate – that's what we do. Lots of co-ordinating. It's making the best of a bad situation. It making things lined up'*. Local VCS organisations, supported by the local authority (including the Welfare Rights Service), have been successful in securing Big Lottery transition funding to help advice agencies to respond effectively to welfare reform and the loss of legal aid. Up to 25% of the award can be used to support the delivery of frontline advice services, while the remaining 75% must be invested in the development of sustainable infrastructure. The funding will be used to develop a multi-agency database to facilitate co-ordinated responses to advice requests and monitor the nature and outcomes of enquiries. Respondents also discussed a large volume of administrative changes, in the form of reallocating functions within teams and setting up new IT systems and establishing dedicated phone lines for particular types of support.

Despite the actions being taken in response to welfare reform, one respondent suggested that other priorities such as responding to funding cuts and undertaking the changes required to administration have limited the attention that has been given to thinking about how low income people could deal with reforms. They explained:

'I think this has caught Councils out because they have been dominated by the budget process and making the cuts. So much time has gone in to implementing administration of the changes, like the social fund. So much has gone into just setting up the systems to administer these processes. It's been the budget stuff, then trying to think about the wider impact of welfare reform and then thinking about all of the practical stuff...changing Council tax systems'.

Similarly, another VCS respondent suggested that evidence of a comprehensive response to welfare reform by the city council was not yet being put into practice:

'The only other thing is I would really like to see a strategic, thought-out approach to the possible impact of the welfare reform. And maybe there is one that I haven't see, or I'm just not in the right place to see it, but, as I say, it's that sort of shrug your shoulders, almost paralysis, we don't really know how it's going to map out. It would be nice to know the authority has a plan'.

However, a local authority respondent noted that the council had taken all the action actions recommended by the Local Government Association and the Core Cities group to prepare low income people for the reforms. They pointed to the existence of a Welfare Reform Board, a Financial Inclusion Partnership (which 47 agencies were actively engaged in) and a monthly Advice Compact that co-ordinates responses.

When it came to the reform that was the focus of most discussion – the introduction of the bedroom tax – it was clear that a large number of options had been, and were being, explored. A typical comment on the potential impact of the bedroom tax was:

'It's going to be a compounded issue but bedroom tax is the big one that I'm really worried about that is going to cause mayhem, particularly for those on low incomes who are struggle to provide food for their families now'.

YHN, working in partnership with the local authority, is managing Newcastle's response to the bedroom tax and the ending of direct rent payments for most people on benefits. Prior to the implementation of the tax, YHN had sent letters to and undertaken home visits with all social housing tenants identified as likely to be affected, to inform them of the changes and discuss their options with them. YHN indicated that these efforts to engage with tenants have mainly been successful. They have also supported tenants to apply for Discretionary Housing Payments (DHPs) where relevant. However, concerns were expressed that the DHPs will not be able to meet demand. One local authority respondent reported that they had some 'very difficult choices' to make about the administering of DHPs.

Another respondent reported that, following home visits to YHN tenants, approximately 1000 requested debt and benefit advice. They added, *'This is within existing resources, which is phenomenal'*. However, there were also reports of a sense of denial among households that they would be affected by the changes: *'I think there a sense of hopelessness for some people. It becomes an unbridgeable gap among people, there's lots*

of denial...not believing it's going to be true or thinking that someone they can see like a housing person can make it better'.

Although some tenants had expressed a willingness to actively seek work and try to make up the rent shortfall, NOMIS figures suggest that, in November 2012, there were 5.4 claimants for every unfilled JCP vacancy. Nonetheless, the local authority is working with Newcastle Futures to support households into work and YHN run a number of employment initiatives for young people. One YHN respondent explained:

'A few years ago people were pushed into doing the government schemes or what were the likes of NACRO where young people were just a number and there was no real quality training. So they would turn up, sit around at the training provider all day not really learning any skills. I think that's changed a huge amount. It's something that YHN has taken a lead of, we've got our own apprentice schemes, we've got Your Homes Your Jobs, we've got work programmes so young people can come in and have work trials and we've got an employability coordinator that coordinates all of that so there's loads going on'.

Some tenants expressed a willingness to move to another property to avoid under-occupancy penalties. Respondents reported that where a property is judged to be unaffordable for a tenant to remain living there, the local authority and YHN are looking to help them secure an alternative, saying 'it wouldn't be right to try and sustain something or to encourage somebody to stay somewhere where they are just generating a debt'. YHN have also looked to change its rent arrears and allocations policies to enable people to move even if they have rent arrears or to take in a lodger if they have spare room. However, the under-occupation figures for Newcastle suggest a shortfall of one bedroom properties in Newcastle. One respondent reported: *'If no one ever became homeless etc., it would take 8 years for YHN to recycle people within smaller units'.*

YHN's approach to addressing problems of under-occupation raise questions about the priority status given to homeless people wanting move on accommodation in the social rented sector compared to tenants who are already living in the sector and are affected by the bedroom tax. As one respondent reported:

'Obviously the big impact for us is the under-occupancy rules...there's a shortage of one-bed accommodation and YHN are having to look to prevent homelessness by moving people, which creates fewer opportunities for people to move on from other forms of crisis and just newly forming households'.

One option being pursued within Newcastle in response to this is to encourage homeless service users looking for move on accommodation to share a tenancy. An alternative for move on accommodation is the private rented sector – this sector is discussed further below.

The local authority and YHN have also considered the reclassification of properties from two bedroomed to one bedroomed, for example. However, legal advice has suggested that this would not be feasible without good management reason. An alternative would be to make physical alterations to properties, although this will have resource implications and will affect the value of the city's social housing stock, with significant financial implications for YHN.

A further option is to allow those who receive personal budgets to make up rent shortfalls from them. One respondent posited: *'How much choice do we offer individuals who want to use their budgets on their rent rather than social care as the stability of a home is more important to their wellbeing than home care?'* At the point of the interview, this option had not been fully explored.

Tyne & Wear Choice-Based Lettings System

All but one of the housing associations in the area are taking part in the new Tyne and Wear choice-based lettings system, which has four bands. Those respondents who commented on the scheme were universally positive. One local authority respondent suggested that there had been no delay in moving homeless people on and that they tended to have more choice, even if they still did not receive exactly the type of offer that they had hoped for. They indicated that even people who were found to be intentionally homeless could usually find accommodation through the choice based letting system, if they were eligible.

Cherry Tree View

Approximately 400 households are accommodated in Cherry Tree View annually. Three respondents who discussed Cherry Tree View commented on how pleasant the physical environment was and suggested that this had had a positive impact on the people who were living there; particularly in comparison to the previous accommodation at Hill Court, where effective services were not matched by the quality of the physical environment:

'It's much easier to manage; it reduces the vulnerability of the people who are living there, who previously the environment didn't protect'.

'It's just a lovely environment, and I think the response that you get from the clients is completely different. I don't think there've been any incidents anywhere near what we had at Hill Court. They're very respectful'.

All three respondents also identified a small negative impact of the better quality environment – individuals and organisations were now keen to access Cherry Tree View, even when this was not appropriate: *'whereas previously they would be, 'Oh, I cannot be putting people into Hill Court', now it is like 'Can they not go into Cherry Tree View?'*

However, nobody has yet refused to leave Cherry Tree View, although there have been some difficulties when households move away from the support that is provided:

'on a couple of cases where they have moved into the community and things have started to unravel so, things like school attendance, you know one of the things that we are good at is helping people to get into a routine and making sure that parents are up with kids to get them into school, and so there is a lot of chivvying people along ...'.

Quarterly reports identify the characteristics of people going into Cheery Tree View and so provide an indication of where the system of homelessness prevention is failing. Attempts

have been made to persuade social workers, for example, of the value of trying to solve problems without people having to move house:

'... we could have prevented the need from somebody coming into temporary accommodation and the disruption that that causes, and also the fact that there isn't an abundance of properties available in the city, so we have to make the best use of the resources that we have got. And for some people it is better to keep them in their home'.

Indeed, when people apply as homeless because family and friends have asked them to move, attempts are made to move them directly to permanent accommodation, without the need for them to move into Cherry Tree View.

Areas of Possible Weakness

All respondents were asked an open question about the weaknesses of the approach to preventing and tackling homelessness in Newcastle. In addition, where appropriate, they were asked specifically about those areas listed as weaknesses in the 2011 evaluation. The areas that were discussed are indicated below.

Private Rented Sector (PRS)

Work with the PRS was identified as a possible weakness by the 2011 evaluation. This sector has grown rapidly since 2009, from 14% to 22% of the housing stock in Newcastle and is now a similar size to YHN. This increase has largely been at the expense of owner occupation and has been matched by increased demand from students and professionals. There is also greater demand from people whose first choice would be social rented property, because reduced turnover has had an impact on the number of available properties. As noted above, in Newcastle and elsewhere in England, there has been a growth in statutory homelessness associated with the ending of private tenancies.

Changes to the Local Authority's Work with the PRS

As was noted above, the Tenancy Relations Service, and the two officers who specialised in this role, is one of the few services to have been lost as a result of funding cuts. The functions are now divided between the homelessness sector, legal services, regulatory services and the Private Rented Service. One respondent described this change as follows:

'although there were two members of staff there, and we're losing that skills and knowledge, we haven't felt that has impacted us too greatly because we already had other complimentary sort of skills within different teams and we've just used them instead of having a specialist, so we've shared the work out'.

Homelessness officers have also played a role in offering advice to tenants about their relationship with their landlords.

Despite its greater role in tenancy relations, the Private Rented Service has seen its staffing base reduce from nine members of staff to five. It has become part of the Fairer Housing Unit. It continues to make the same offer to landlords and tenants as it did prior to the onset of funding cuts, but has relocated from community-based premises outside the city centre to Newcastle's Civic Centre. The relocation of the service was reported to have initially led to a significant reduction in the number of landlords engaging with service. This was attributed to landlords feeling uncomfortable attending the more 'corporate' environment of the new premise. One respondent reported: *'they now see us very much as a corporate service because we're based in the Civic, and that's meant a lot of disengagement from landlords, although we're offering exactly the same services'*. This was particularly true in relation to individual landlords with small property portfolios:

'the majority of landlords that we engage with on a day-to-day basis are those smaller landlords and those are the ones who don't like coming in. They see the Council as a very intimidating place. They want just somebody at the end of the phone'.

Disengagement was compounded by the introduction of charges to landlords for joining and for advertising properties with the service. Overall, the service went from advertising a high of approximately 50-60 properties to roughly 10 at its lowest point, which limited the accommodation options available to potential tenants. This figure is now recovering due to the temporary suspension of fees and the trialling of different approaches to engagement with landlords (by meeting them in public places such as coffee shops or at their properties, for example). Approximately 20-30 properties were being advertised with the service at the point of interview.

In contrast to landlords, the relocation of the service was reported to have had a positive impact on levels of engagement with tenants. Not only were they reported to be used to accessing Council offices, but the co-location of the service within the same premises as the Revenue and Benefits and other relevant teams has effectively created a one-stop-shop for tenants, thereby improving the accessibility and convenience of the service.

Role of the PRS in Preventing and Tackling Homelessness

In the course of the research, a number of possible weaknesses in engagement with the private rented sector were identified. One local authority respondent, commenting on the Troubled Families Programme reported that *'as part of the overall work on prevention it's generally positive'*, but had some concerns about families with multiple needs living in the private rented sector and the local authority's limited involvement with them. Another commented that floating support for tenants of private landlords was a weakness in the network of services available in Newcastle.

Where the private rented sector was being used to provide housing for homeless households, the speed at which property could be made available to homeless households was a particular cause for concern. Delays were sometimes linked to a political push by Councillors to achieve high quality standards in private rented accommodation, which meant that work had to be undertaken before a tenant could move in. One respondent commented:

'I just wish that we did have availability within the private rented sector where you've got somebody who has been in prison, addressed all their addictions, doing really well, and you know that what you're going to be able to offer them possibly is maybe going to be a hostel'.

Potential For the Involvement of Private Landlords

Aside from procedural issues, a more fundamental concern was whether private landlords were equipped or motivated to house homeless households. Of course, the private rented sector is one over which the local authority has very limited control and one that has been substantially affected by the increase in the number of students moving into Newcastle in the last decade. The perceived difficulties of the private rented sector playing a role in tackling homelessness were summarised by one respondent:

'.. the private rented sector in Newcastle is a very complex beast, and what it is getting asked to achieve through the homelessness agenda isn't necessarily what the market is set up to provide. It's a free market, landlords are free to offer it out to whatever tenant, or whatever market that they want to provide it to, and they will go down the easiest route for them, and what we're asking for them to do, and how we're asking them to do it with the high standards and the type of tenant that we link them up with, sometimes goes against that, and I think there needs to be an understanding that you know, private landlords are not necessarily geared up to be a replacement for social housing'.

Welfare reforms were perceived to be a major obstacle to private landlords housing homeless households:

'The private sector is becoming harder anyway because of the benefits system. The end of direct payment to the landlord...no one is going to house anyone on benefits, don't be ridiculous. If you were a landlord, would you?...particularly your single, unemployed young man between 20 and 45, with a learning disability, a mental health problem...'

'The private sector is drying up badly and understandably so because of the changes to the payment of housing benefit and universal credit'.

It was suggested that the Shared Accommodation Rent has made private landlords cautious about letting to people on low incomes, as had changes such as the bedroom tax, which some landlords may not be aware does not apply to their property.

One respondent suggested that more work needs to be taken with landlords if they are to accept people with complex needs, rather than others who are likely to be perceived as a 'safer' option and could sometimes be charged higher rents.

However, some respondents were more optimistic, pointing to the early successes of Housing First and to the good links with the private sector that have been established by the advice and support workers at Cherry Tree View. Some landlords are engaging with supported housing providers and credit unions with a view to housing more people on low incomes. The complexity of the private rented market was emphasised:

'they've [landlords have] bought the properties, done them up to a standard because they know they can achieve that standard, and they've offered them out a market rent, a low level market rent, and they know that there's a market there and they've really grasped it, and we've had some, you know they are now significant landlords operating in those areas, operating at a market rent level that people can afford to go into. But we've also seen a number of other landlords who have just said, 'No I want to move away from that'. And I don't think people have said, again they want to move away from offering tenancies to people on benefits, but when you get them in a one on one situation and say to them, 'Look we're offering you a tenant here who's coming with a support package, direct payments' you know, when we talk to them, they will go back and say, 'Yes I'll offer a tenancy to that low end of the market', but it's hard work to get there, that negotiation for the rent levels and things like that'.

A VCS respondent agreed that the relationship with the PRS was improving while suggesting that: *'the access to the private rented sector hasn't been as robust as it could have been ...'*

Whatever the potential of the PRS, there was a widespread acknowledgement, among respondents of both the local authority and the VCS, of the need to make homeless and low income people more attractive to private landlords, particularly in the light of welfare reform. To this end, there had been an expansion of cash incentives to landlords to bring their properties to the required standard and to insure them against possible financial losses arising from re-housing homeless people and/or those with complex needs.

Evictions from Housing Association Properties

One respondent acknowledged continuing difficulties in dialogue with housing associations over this issue and over other questions, as associations tend to work across a number of local authority areas and so are unwilling to meet each local authority individually. However, the local authority tends to be informed of evictions from housing association properties and the four respondents who commented on this issue all thought that it was a relatively minor problem.

Engagement of Mental Health Services in Homeless Prevention

Respondents who commented on this issue agreed that it was a continuing difficulty. A number identified problems arising from many homeless people having complex needs but not being in touch with mental health services because their problems were not considered to be treatable or because they did not meet the statutory 'threshold' for services. One respondent from the voluntary sector suggested that this situation might be alleviated by providing more mental health training for staff or by employing staff with a mental health specialism. On this theme, a local authority respondent identified the mental health social worker at Cherry Tree View as a very positive influence:

'she understands the context and she appreciates that it is not just an accommodation based problem, and that you need to generate a level of trust and engagement with somebody before you can truly assess the extent of their mental health ... she is a problem solver'.

Further difficulties identified in this area were the limited system of trusteeships for people who cannot manage their money – a situation likely to be aggravated by the introduction of Universal Credit – and the only option for workers faced by challenging behaviour sometimes being to contact the police, which could have negative consequences for the homeless person.

Provision for Non-Priority Single Men

Linked to the issue of mental health services – and the next two sections on services for people leaving custody and those with complex needs – is the question of provision for non-priority single men. Despite this being identified as a possible area of weakness in the 2011 evaluation, there were a number of positive factors identified in relation to this group. Firstly, the number of bed spaces for this group has not been affected by funding cuts to date, although it remains to be seen whether this continues to be the case when further reductions in funding take effect. Secondly, as noted previously, the access to move on accommodation that the Cyrenians have negotiated with private rented sector landlords through Housing First was seen as an important development. Thirdly, the Gateway system was praised for enabling the local authority to collect substantial amounts of data about single homeless clients who enter the supported housing sector and the manner in which they leave or move on. In particular, it can identify how many people achieve a supported move on from supported accommodation, while acknowledging difficulties in distinguishing between supported and unsupported moves.

Three respondents identified as a major area of improvement the creation of a traffic lights system to assess the readiness of people living in supported / temporary accommodation to move to permanent housing. This involves regular meetings between providers of supported and permanent housing. In addition to the obvious benefits in terms of ensuring that the most appropriate people move on to permanent housing, and of face-to-face meetings between different agencies, two other benefits of this system were identified:

- The creation of a consensus as to what constitutes readiness for independence.
- The identification of barriers to independence, whereupon the YHN Pathways advisers can become involved to identify possible methods of removing these barriers. The Pathways advisers can also help people to navigate the Tyne and Wear Homes allocations system.

However, there were clearly still difficulties for this group, with one respondent suggesting that the shared accommodation rate was a particular problem. Another suggested that there was 'still lots of room for improvement' in services for single homeless people while a third argued that people continually moving between projects was a manifestation of deep rooted problems which would be difficult to resolve:

'I think there's a lot of clients have support needs beyond their homelessness and I think it can be very, very difficult to break that cycle. And I think that for all that we try and have a preventative approach, what we can't do is we can't fundamentally change the clients that we're dealing with. And I suppose maybe in some ways there is an element of being victims of our success in that if people know that they can get a bed in, you know, a clean kind of well-run hostel and that if they don't pay their rent then the likelihood is they'll be

able to stay anyway... Then it's very hard to kind of break that link in people's minds that that is one of their options. Having said that, I do think we're doing all we can to reduce that to improve move-on'.

Services for People Leaving Custody

One respondent from the local authority, and one from the voluntary sector, commented that difficulties associated with leaving custody were concentrated among those people who had the most complex needs and problematic behaviour. As the local authority respondent put it:

' .. it [being released from custody] is still one of the main causes for people ending up rough sleeping, but it does tend to be the multiply excluded, so it's not like it's new people, it is the same people, who have got very limited options'.

Three respondents discussed the difficulty that prisoners would sometimes give an address that they could not stay at, just to make sure that they were released, which could mean that they became homeless without services knowing about it. Other practical difficulties associated with trying to house this group were that some housing providers would not conduct telephone interviews, that there was no provision specifically for female offenders, that there were some difficulties working with the probation service due to internal issues that they faced and that there was a lack of specific funding to provide bed spaces for offenders.

However, three respondents from the local authority reported a degree of progress in this area. Two of these respondents suggested that the Gateway had played a part; with one elaborating on its advantages while acknowledging that difficulties remained:

'But what we try to do – and it works really well ... we ask the prison to put them on the Gateway, and we identify accommodation prior to release. And what we do is ring the prison and there's money available to hold a bed for two or three nights, so we ask for the discharge grant and if we know there's a bed on the Thursday but the person's not getting out until the Monday then we'll hold that bed, just to make sure that they're not coming out of prison onto the street. To be honest, that works really well. It would be nice to have other options available for people coming out of prison. For some guys, we will try to get them into supported accommodation, but we can't guarantee that that's going to be available on the day of release, so sometimes it's a short stay in a hostel with a plan to move on to something more suitable. And I have to be honest, it works ... '.

New services provided by Shelter and Foundation to provide housing advice and support to prisoners while in custody are another possible source of progress, although one respondent expressed reservations about this work, saying: 'It hasn't worked as yet, but it's only been going for a couple of months'. They also commented on the frustration associated with one public sector organisation (the Ministry of Justice) providing funding to address the way in which another (the local authority) was perceived to be carrying out its statutory duties. They suggested that the end result of the process could simply be a re-allocation of resources:

'... you end up with one bit of the state fighting another bit about whether somebody has or hasn't got a statutory right, and I'm not quite sure that's the most productive use of public money. Because if somebody wins that case it just pushes somebody else out of a limited amount of housing'.

Less fundamental difficulties that were identified were that Shelter's resources were stretched, that neither they nor Foundation had the capacity to check the address that prisoners said they were going to be released to and that housing providers might be cautious because Shelter stop working with clients on their release from prison (although Foundation can work with them for thirteen weeks afterwards).

Chronically Excluded People and Evictions From Supported Accommodation

Counts of rough sleepers suggest that the average number is eight per night, which represents an increase from recent years but is still a small number compared to comparable cities. Since the launch of NSNO, a very small number of cases of rough sleeping have been categorised as such. Instead, the current cohort of rough sleepers in Newcastle is largely comprised of chronically excluded individuals who are known to the local authority. They tend to have accommodation options but have complex needs (including substance misuse and offending behaviour) which prevent them from accepting or being able to meet the expectations of accommodation providers. Several respondents believed that the incidence of depression, alcohol abuse and violent behaviour had all increased among this group.

There has been an increase in evictions from hostels, which has risen from a historical low of 10-12% to a current figure of 31% - a figure that does not include those who 'disappear.' One respondent suggested that some disappearances could be attributed to an increase in illegal money lending and a decreasing timescale in which the problem could be tackled before people disappeared. They also suggested that rent arrears were an increasing reason for evictions from supported/temporary accommodation and that the increase in evictions was linked to repeated admissions:

'So there was something like 44 individuals since 2010 had 254 admissions into temporary accommodation, now none of those individuals moved on in a positive way, the outcome or the reason for discharge was either evicted or abandoned. So I think kind of says something, that that small group can have that many admits and the range of it was like one up to 19, so one individual had 19 admissions into emergency accommodation'.

Turning to possible specific reasons for the increase in evictions, one respondent suggested that a bi-product of the more appropriate allocation of resources was that those with less severe needs tended to move into accommodation with less support and then into independence quite quickly, leaving those with more severe needs concentrated in emergency accommodation causing 'an incredible amount of havoc' – there was often no suitable offer for them. Another respondent suggested that there were inexperienced staff within some hostels, who found difficulties in dealing with addictions and aggressive behaviour on the part of the most difficult people. One respondent suggested that there seemed to be more people who were chaotic at a younger age.

Addressing Complex Needs More Effectively

Two reasons were offered by respondents for continuing to meet the needs of the most chronically excluded individuals. One was ideological:

'.. if we are saying as a city, as an authority, our priorities are tackling inequalities, creating decent neighbourhoods, helping people get into work and that group are the ones that suffer most, in terms of inequalities'

A more pragmatic reason was the problems that people with complex needs could create for communities and for the public perception of the homelessness service:

'They're the people that will commit more crimes, they're the people that will be more anti-social, they're the people that will create your headlines and your scandals if they're not supported and managed properly'

A number of new steps have been taken to meet the needs of the most chronically excluded individuals, at both a strategic and a practical level. The local authority has identified workstreams around key groups of homeless people; one of which is multiply excluded people. This was seen by one local authority respondent as recognition that new methods had to be found to meet the needs of this group:

'So we know that our problem with rough sleeping isn't about new people coming through, it is about a very, kind of, static group of individuals with multiple needs ... we need to think differently about how we model the market around the support in homelessness to better meet these individual needs ...'

A voluntary sector respondent commented that *'it's excellent that complex needs is being looked at [as] a specific area within the services'*. Another suggested there was a need to offer services that could be tailored more to the needs of the individual and saw the move towards seeing this group as having multiple needs as helpful.

In terms of practical measures, the common case management group was once again cited as an effective means of supporting the most chronically excluded people in the city, with one voluntary sector respondent saying:

'The common case management group is still an effective means of being able to look at the person's needs in a multi-agency fashion and see what options we've got'

Also on the theme of joint working, one respondent noted that a consensus had been established about acceptable and unacceptable behaviour within hostels, which was reflected in the Sustaining Tenancies Guidance and regular meetings to discuss those people who were at risk of eviction from supported accommodation. Another respondent discussed the possibility of more opportunities for different providers to meet to discuss methods of tackling problematic behaviour. The Drug Management Protocol was being updated at the time of the research; this protocol includes Northumbria Police and there was a suggestion that the police should sometimes play a greater role rather than staff being left to tackle difficult behaviour alone.

The availability of money to spot purchase services for short term interventions aimed at problematic behaviour was another positive development identified, as was the ability of the homeless section to write off rent arrears if this was the reason that someone was facing eviction. One respondent suggested that some of the problems associated with addictions could be effectively tackled by employing specialist addictions workers at direct access hostels. They also believed that relationships with the community were now better managed in terms of challenging behaviour of residents of supported accommodation. There was better communication and a greater understanding that people living in supported accommodation were part of the community. Similarly, a local authority respondent suggested that it was very important for staff of Cherry Tree View to have links with the community because *'it is important that we are not causing problems and it is not detrimental to being here'*.

Suitability of Hostel Accommodation

There was a consensus among the three respondents who discussed the issue of standards in temporary/supported accommodation that these standards were high, although ideally there would not be so much large hostel accommodation. The refurbishment of much of the accommodation had taken place before the 2011 evaluation, with shared rooms in hostels eliminated. Since then, Cherry Tree View has replaced Hill Court as the local authority's temporary accommodation, providing hugely improved physical facilities, as was discussed above.

There remained concern over the suitability of some large hostels – particularly those where the design is problematic – but it was acknowledged that there are not the resources available to convert these into smaller units as had happened in the past with the Foyer, for example. One respondent said of large hostels:

'I just think large hostels have had their time. I think we've moved on from that. I might be wrong, I don't know. Maybe there is a need for them, I don't know. Personally I just think it's like an institution'.

A range of difficulties linked to addictions were reported as occurring in hostels; one respondent discussed service users openly taking drugs, while another suggested that it was more difficult to take action in the case of legal highs because they were, by definition, legal. One voluntary sector respondent said that evictions were only ever due to violence and that this violence could usually be attributed to alcohol use. However, another suggested that service users might be disadvantaged by living in supported accommodation because most people who were drunk would not face a threat to their housing unless their behaviour led to the police being contacted.

One more positive development had occurred in the case of move on from hostels and other forms of supported accommodation, where meetings are regularly held between the VCS and providers of permanent accommodation, linked to a traffic light system, assessing whether residents are ready to move on. One respondent said of these meetings:

'It's interesting, when I first started the meetings, we would be discussing the cases in green, and they would be telling me, 'We're struggling to get rent from them, their behaviour

is this, their behaviour is that'. And I would say, 'Well why are they in green?' ... months down the line now, when we go to those meetings, the discussions that we're having, I've really noticed the change, and the right people are moving on. Because that to me is so crucial because it just prevents that cycle of repeat homelessness and bouncing people from one place to another'.

One respondent discussed a possible longer term solution of moving away from the concept of emergency accommodation when services are next re-commissioned and instead seeking to create an assessment process that can place a service user directly into the most suitable type of accommodation. This is discussed further in the commissioning section.

Employment for Homeless People

One local authority respondent suggested that employment was an important element of the homelessness prevention strategy and there was a need to co-ordinate resources. A respondent from the VCS suggested that employment opportunities should be given a higher level of priority, commenting on the frustration for service users of moving from training programme to training programme, and suggesting that the local authority could set as a condition of commissioning services that a percentage of former service users should be employed by organisations.

User Involvement

Respondents agreed that there were some pockets of good practice in relation to user involvement: through Youth Voice and the Young People's Forum, for example, and with some of the supported housing providers consulting their service users extensively and giving them places on their board. In addition, approximately 25% of the staff of one NGO are ex-service users and peer support plays a major role in their services. However, it was acknowledged that user involvement was still a weakness in the homelessness service as a whole and that there were difficulties in service users being able to give an overview of the local authority's role when most services were provided by the voluntary sector. The Active Inclusion Forum was identified as a place where service users might eventually feel empowered to give their views.

Service Gaps

Three gaps in service provision were discussed in the course of the interviews. One respondent suggested that the absence of a dry hostel was a weakness and another that there was a need to provide support for young parents whose children were at risk of being taken into care (although this might be more the responsibility of children's and adults' social care than homelessness services). In addition, two respondents suggested that there were weaknesses in the area of floating supporting, although for very different reasons. One noted that the extremely thorough steps taken to ensure that supported housing resources were allocated to people who needed them most through the Gateway was not mirrored in the allocation of floating support. For example, there were records to

show the individuals supported through floating support, but not the source of the referral. It was anticipated that floating support would eventually mirror supported housing in the manner in which resources were allocated. The second difficulty identified was the lack of designated support workers for people living in the private rented sector, despite their needs often being as great (or greater) than those of tenants of the social rented sector. As this respondent put it:

'I do think you know, that that's the gap that I was talking about, you know the support for private tenants just isn't there. Although, I mean you could argue that there are other support, that private tenant is the same as owner occupier, is the same as YHN that they can go to get debt advice and other things, but when it comes down to those negotiations with private landlords and other things, that that's just you know, not there. I mean obviously we've seen the cuts in the CAB and Shelter, and their housing advice, the legal sectors and stuff like that, that's just starting to bite now as well, so I think there's going to be a lot more need for private rented sector tenancy support, and I don't know if that's been grasped'.

Another respondent implied that there was a lack of floating support when they discussed an *'over reliance on supported accommodation or hostel accommodation'*.

Hopes / Fears for the Future

There were mixed views as to how far the quality of services to prevent and tackle homelessness in Newcastle could be maintained in the light of further austerity measures, with some respondents hopeful that the further strengthening of strategic planning and partnership working could prevent major damage to services, while others were more pessimistic.

A Holistic Approach and Culture of Prevention

Some local authority and VCS respondents suggested that the 'very robust' and 'strong' foundations of the homelessness and related sectors in Newcastle would enable a culture of prevention to be maintained. Comments included:

'We've got a lot of good services, a lot of good networks, a lot of good relationships, so I'm not too concerned over it. I think it is about maintaining that. I think that's going to be the big challenge. I've got concerns over the complex cases and who picks up those cases as frontline services get more and more stretched...that might be an issue that we've just got to keep our eye on'.

'I think as homelessness services in Newcastle, we've obviously got the strategy going forward, I think we come from a very strong place, and it is just about maintaining it and making sure that we're all talking to each other, so as those challenges come up and we're identifying more gaps, we're in a good place to deal with them'.

'I think they are going to be far more aware of value and getting bang for their buck but I think they are by far the best placed to do that. They are definitely the best local authority in terms of administration in the region. They have retained the skills, the knowledge base'.

Local authority respondents stressed that maintaining the culture of prevention which currently exists within Newcastle should remain the priority. Responses included: *'I think our priorities are prevention – obviously that is our main priority', 'I think it's, really it's that kind of prevention'* and *'I think preventing. I think early intervention'*. One local authority respondent stressed that in light of public spending cuts and welfare reform, where an increasing number of households are likely to fall into crisis, a focus on prevention is more paramount than ever before as it is only through early intervention that the local authority will be able to maximise the support that it can offer to households:

'We can anticipate that actually those in crisis are going to increase and increase because of all the different cumulative impacts of different cuts and welfare reform, so I think certainly from a commissioning perspective, that focus on prevention and making sure that people get the right intervention at the right time in their lives and throughout their lives...to make a difference before prices kind of crash... it is going to have remain in the forefront if we are going to be able to respond to the cuts'.

However, others had concerns about whether the culture of prevention could be maintained in practice, with fears of an increasing danger that the local authority will be forced to retreat

to the provision only of statutory services if capacity continues to reduce and the number of homeless presentations increases. One local authority respondent stated: *'we're down to such low levels of staff and with the cuts; we're at significant risk if we have any long-term sickness or pregnancy'. Another respondent argued: 'they start cutting the funding and then everything that underpins the reasons why preventions work starts to slip a little bit'.*

One VCS respondent suggested that it was welfare reform that might present the greatest threat to prevention work:

'I don't know what the numbers are going to be, but I suspect we're going to get to towards the end of this year and all those people that have struggled to pay their extra charge with the bedroom tax may not have tenancies. They have to go somewhere. How you maintain the prevention agenda if those numbers of people go through the roof....well all you can really do is assess are you statutory homeless? I think there's an argument so say that they are, but I suspect a lot of them will probably be found not to be...but where are they actually going to go?'

Maintaining and Extending Partnership Working

As noted above, some respondents had concerns already that there was not the time to develop relationships between agencies that there once had been and one local respondent expressed concerns that this could have an impact on inter-agency working:

'We've tried to retain our frameworks and networks for prevention, but it starts to have an impact, and as these people get more stretched, their relationships with other parts of the system become fraught'.

Another expressed concern that the toolkits that had been developed for a range of agencies must not be allowed to *'fall by the wayside'*.

One local authority respondent noted that Newcastle was responding to concerns such as these by encouraging more agencies to consider the implications of their work for homelessness. For example Common Financial Assessments had been introduced – a common framework used by all agencies for considering affordability and the early identification of the risk of homelessness due to debt.

Commissioning

The local authority is facing an additional 24% funding cut, with a £1.74M cut to SP. These cuts were the subject of much discussion. Some local authority respondents saw a (limited) positive side to them, noting that they presented an opportunity for a wholesale review of the commissioning, nature and method of delivery of homeless services and the further maximisation of resources. Comments included:

'I think it does give us opportunities to look at things afresh really. Do we really need the buildings that we've got? Are they still fit for purpose? Are there any gaps?'

'My view is that despite the pain of the cuts, the [homeless] sector has been the same for a long time and we know that it doesn't work for a significant group of people within our communities, so I think it is a good time to be thinking about what we can do differently to make sure that it meets the needs of different populations of homeless people'.

Indeed, the local authority is currently undertaking discussions internally and with providers about the development of a new commissioning framework. Three respondents discussed methods by which they hoped to develop the framework. One suggested that the concept of emergency accommodation could be rejected in favour of a system that sought to find the most suitable accommodation for people's needs, while another suggested that people might still need a temporary solution before moving onto an option that could meet their needs in a sustained manner. This concept of sustainability should move beyond a simple assessment of stable housing:

'.. moving them on into sustained or more sustainable living situations but that goes with accessing employment or education, access to money, it is all those types of things that we monitor in terms of outcomes for individuals'.

Two respondents suggested that, while the funding of services had already become more closely linked to evidence of need, there would need to be more examination of the outcomes that were achieved by services when making commissioning decisions. As one put it: *'we're going to have to go even more into an outcomes-based framework that brings in other areas of funding as well'.*

The local authority plans to commission accommodation based and non-accommodation based services to meet a range of needs of particular client groups, so service providers will need to work together to meet these needs. Four client groups, or more accurately areas of need, had been identified. The thinking behind this approach was elaborated by one respondent:

'And what we're trying to do is make sure that we've got like a coherent system for each of those kind of groups. So for people who are multiply excluded, we're accepting that they're not going to thrive – the majority of them – in the kind of generic homelessness hostel environment, so what's our offer for those clients? What do we do with them when we first find them? How do we, where do we put them as an alternative to the streets? What's our kind of pathway for them into independence or like the greatest amount of independence they're able to sustain long-term. And the different kind of resources that we might use to alleviate that'.

One example of the type of contract that would be tendered as part of this new approach was:

'a framework contract to support young people aged 16 - 25, you know with chaotic lives, what type of interventions will be in that type of framework contract, what will that specification look like and then I suppose the providers would then be able to come together to make partnerships to be able to respond to that tender opportunity'.

One VCS respondent expressed concern about the philosophy underlying these changes, saying:

'... you might have young people but they're also sometimes on the street ... sometimes have mental health issues or are chronically complex needs and chronically excluded. So people travel between the groups'

A likely consequence of this approach is that one accommodation project might find that a certain percentage of its bed spaces are part of a bid (with other organisations) to meet needs of young people, while a further percentage is part of a bid to meet mental health needs, etcetera. The hope is that this will result in the improved coordination of services and improved outcomes for service users, particularly those with complex needs who often remain within the system for significant periods of time, as discussed previously.

Such an approach is likely to result in organisations working in consortia. One local authority respondent saw collaboration as the most effective method of dealing with cuts:

'This has happened quite a bit over the last 12 months, but, you know, generally there is this kind of view that actually we do have to work together in order to kind of, like, survive the future, I suppose. We are kind of forced into it as well'

There was awareness among local authority respondents of the need for caution in introducing this new approach:

'What we don't want to do is destabilise the market place...We have spent over 10 years under the supporting people umbrella to build relationships, to make links...and that we mitigate, as far as possible, any risks in terms of individuals slipping through the net or not receiving the right support at the right time'

Although local authority respondents tended to be more positive about the impact of this new form of commissioning than those from the VCS, all acknowledged that there would be major difficulties in seeking to commission an effective range of services in the light of such substantial funding cuts. As one local authority respondent put it:

'It's hard to imagine that everything will be as good and the same when we take that much money out of it, but hopefully it won't be 24% worse because we'll be able to better align services'

The specific potential difficulties that were identified by respondents are discussed in the remaining sections.

Losing Services

Local authority respondents expressed concern that services for which there was a heavy demand might be lost. Typical comments here were: *'If you look at all of them and you look at the Gateway provision, you'll find that none of them are empty for any length of time. So the demand is there'* and *'None of the services are ever looking for referrals. The demand is always there. There is always a waiting list'*. Respondents also feared that decreasing provision might coincide with increasing demand across a range of statutory and VCS services and critically, welfare reform. Comments included:

'It is likely that the cuts are going to become bigger and bigger, that we will get hit and that we will either lose [or downsize] some of our services...the impact on the local communities will be quite high and then on the Council in terms of increases in homelessness and stuff like that. These are desperate times really'.

All of the local authority respondents interviewed expressed concern that future funding cuts will, for the first time, result in the loss of accommodation and support services for homeless client groups. Comments here included: *'£1.7 million, that's got to go out of the SP budget which is a significant amount and I don't think that's going to be achieved without the loss of staff, without the loss of some bed spaces'* and *'it's a huge reduction...so policy, strategy, fine, but the delivery is going to be hit and I think everybody's facing that'*.

Respondents' certitude in this was linked to the limited scope for further efficiency savings within services. One local authority respondent, for example, explained: *'A lot of the slack's gone...we're really now down to the bare bones so any money you take out now, it will have an actual impact on service delivery'*. Similarly, one VCS respondent stated: *'The local authority's view seems to have been very much 'we like what we've got, we'd quite like to keep a lot of what we've got, can you do it for less?' Because we're big, as a provider we've always found ways to accommodate different things, so nothing's fundamentally changed. But, with the scale of cuts coming this time, I think we're beyond that point'*.

More specifically, one VCS respondent expressed concern that as a result of further cuts, the niche projects and spot-purchasing in response to needs in Newcastle, which make it unique from other local authority areas, will be lost due to limited cost-benefit analyses of these project, despite the projects being considered anecdotally to have improved outcomes for service users. One local authority respondent acknowledged that services were likely to be lost as a result of the new approach to funding:

'We are moving away, it is going to more system designed than individual projects, which I think is probably a good way of ordering but it is not something that we have really done before. It will be painful and there will be services, I would think, that will go, but I think that has to happen'.

Alternatively, one respondent suggested that further funding cuts will impact not on the range of services they deliver but the number of service users that they can support:

'They're in effect saying to us, "Oh that's a 24% cut, can we provide the same services on 24% less money?" Well we can provide the same services, just not the same quantity I would argue, and that's, that's the huge challenge that everyone's got going forward...something's going to fail somewhere along the line I think sadly'.

Collaboration

One local authority respondent suggested that, in recent years, there had been more collaboration between the main providers of services in the city and less competition about who housed the most difficult service users. However, while it was hoped that all organisations would see the value of working together, it was acknowledged that there were tensions when organisations were sometimes collaborating and sometimes competing:

'I think we have got overall, a strong sector in Newcastle that does, kind of, have that general sense of a common goal, and actually together we are stronger, but ultimately you are always going to have that kind of tension, you know working in a market place really'.

However, one of the supported housing providers was not so positive, noting the good work that was being put in to achieve collaboration, but arguing that it was against a backdrop of years of competition. There were also practical difficulties with co-operation: one respondent suggested that it was difficult to create partnerships between organisations that covered very different geographical areas. A respondent from YHN, while positive about collaborating with other providers to provide services, pointed out that the YHN support services tended to be subsidised through their other business ventures, but that it would not be possible to continue to cross subsidise in this way to match the expected reductions in the funding currently received from the Council. In addition the providers funded by the Council offer a different quality of service, for example YHN employ social work qualified staff, some other providers do not, and where cost is becoming an increasingly critical factor this may mean the Council could substitute expenditure reductions for quality.

One VCS respondent suggested that, despite the removal of the SP ring-fence, they would like to see some of the local authority's budget preserved for the most chronically excluded people in the city and not become focused on those with general needs who have become homeless as a result of welfare reform to ensure that *'the vulnerable people don't get hammered because they're a smaller, less popular group when the bigger impacts hit'*.

A respondent working for a large provider suggested that the new arrangements were likely to have negative consequences for smaller organisations:

'Cuts to the public sector are going to impact on other smaller organisations – those with a turnover of between 0 and 2 million pounds – as contracts are going to be bigger...you need the infrastructure, the larger organisations like ours are going to pick up these contracts and monopolise the contracts'.

A further fear expressed by a voluntary sector respondent was that the opportunity to innovate would be lost as contracts were delivered to tighter specifications. However, they praised the local authority for avoiding a 'salami slicing' approach to making cuts and instead looking for new methods of meeting the needs of service users at lower cost.

On another more positive note, one voluntary sector respondent suggested that responsibility was shared between the local authority and the voluntary sector for dealing with cuts and unmet needs: the local authority needed to be clear about what was expected in terms of collaboration and partnership working, while the voluntary sector should ensure that *'we make sure that as providers and partnerships that we actually create some of those solutions as well.'*

Service Standards

Finally, in addition to the potential loss of services, a danger was noted that the focus on high quality might be lost, both in terms of the physical environment and support services. One VCS respondent, for example, said:

'I would like to see the authority not lose, and it's in there in the stuff they're proposing, but not lose its focus on quality of accommodation. I think there's a risk here that we slip back into the modern equivalent, the 21st Century equivalent of spike place where we can just put people because there's nowhere else to put them. And there are a whole load of commercial vultures out there that have property that would be willing to do that and I think it's really important the authority maintains its commitment to quality'.

Linked to this fear, another provider stressed the need for flexibility with contracts to respond to service users needs appropriately.

Conclusion

Since the previous evaluation was undertaken in 2011, organisations working to prevent and tackle homelessness in Newcastle have faced increasing difficulties, most notably as a result of cuts to public spending and welfare reform. The consensus that emerged from this evaluation was that, despite these difficulties, the local authority continues to provide and co-ordinate high quality services for homeless (and potentially homeless) people and is seeking to develop and improve these services. The analysis of statutory homelessness trends undertaken for this report supports this positive assessment, with Newcastle comparing favourably with the other core cities in England across a range of key indicators, including trends in homelessness acceptances and TA placements. The creation of Active Inclusion Newcastle, and the traffic lights system to assess the readiness of people living in supported accommodation to move on, are among the recent developments that appear to have enhanced the network of service provision.

In addition, in most of the areas identified that have been suggested to be weaknesses of services, initiatives are being taken to address the difficulties. There is a consensus that a group of chronically excluded people with complex needs are concentrated in emergency accommodation and that it is very difficult to find an appropriate solution for them, particularly in the light of the limited engagement of mental health services with homeless people. However, measures are being taken to tackle these difficulties, at both a strategic and a practical level. The early results of the Housing First initiative are particularly encouraging; this is an area where more evaluation is needed. Other initiatives that need to be evaluated further are the new housing related support services for people leaving custody and the project to provide intensive support to care leavers.

Housing First provides an example of effective engagement with the private rented sector. There are differing opinions as to the role that this sector can play in preventing and tackling homelessness, but efforts need to continue to engage with landlords in this sector: this evaluation highlighted the necessity of accessing more move on accommodation in the context of anticipated increases in demand for homelessness services and difficulties in accessing one bedroomed social rented housing as a result of the bedroom tax.

The new strategies that are being devised by the local authority to tackle cuts to the Supporting People budget were broadly welcomed, although Voluntary and Community Sector respondents expressed more reservations than those on the local authority side. However effective these measures are, there are a range of possible detrimental effects of both welfare reform and cuts to local authority expenditure on services. In this context, it is important that the local authority seeks to maximise the 'free' services that are available through faith groups and to consider further the strategic allocation of floating support.

Although it seems impossible that the quality of services can remain completely unaffected by cuts, the key challenge facing all working in the homelessness sector in Newcastle is to protect as far as possible the culture of prevention, and the commitment to partnership working, that are currently serving homeless people so well.