

Active Inclusion Newcastle

Newcastle's Financial Inclusion Briefing: 2018-19 Q4

Promoting financial inclusion is an important part of Newcastle City Council and its partners' commitment to tackling inequality. Our approach to financial inclusion is based on working in partnership through our Financial Inclusion Group to provide information, advice and support to residents when they face difficulties, and promoting early intervention to prevent problems reaching crisis point. Whilst many of the causes of poverty are out of our control by working together we can make the best use of the resources available to make the greatest difference for residents.

To support this cooperative approach, we aim to share systems, and priorities to help meet the challenges created by the welfare reforms (£122m cut in Newcastle by 2024) and austerity measures (£283m cut by 2020). To help facilitate this we produce a quarterly briefing note to create a common language, to highlight trends and to review our responses to the following six objectives in our Financial Inclusion Action Plan:

- 1. Maximise income and respond to the welfare reforms**
- 2. Support residents to manage their money, increase financial resilience, reduce harmful debt and prevent homelessness**
- 3. Help residents to train, gain and remain in employment**
- 4. Promote affordable credit options**
- 5. Reduce fuel poverty, increase financial resilience and promote access to bank accounts**
- 6. Tackle food poverty**

Our quarterly review process helps to create collective agreement about the issues residents face and the difference we are making to those who experience financial exclusion. We recognise that there are limitations in some of the data collected, as organisations invariably count their interventions differently. However, there is sufficient agreement for us to produce these briefing notes to demonstrate the work of the Financial Inclusion Group. Our main aim is to make a positive difference and reduce inequality by prioritising financial inclusion, not to produce a piece of pure academic research. However, we welcome partners to point out any errors or opportunities for improvement.

Headlines:

- Our Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) budget allocation for this year has been reduced by £235,896, meaning we have less funding to temporarily support residents with housing costs, shortfalls mainly caused by reductions to Housing Benefit or housing costs within Universal Credit
- Support for Universal Credit claims in Newcastle is provided by the government-funded Citizens Advice Newcastle 'Help to Claim' scheme and by council staff in the East End and West End Community Hubs. Help for Universal Credit claimants with budgeting needs is provided by Your Homes Newcastle and the council's Money Matters service. Details are available at www.newcastle.gov.uk/universalcredit-moredetail
- In February 2019, a third Learning Hive was launched within the Blakelaw Centre, providing employment support to residents. Further information is available at www.learninghive.uk
- Newcastle City Council and Street Games have secured funding to support disadvantaged children during summer school holidays by providing meals and activities. For more information contact Duncan O'Farrell by email duncan.ofarrell@newcastle.gov.uk
- Herriot-Watt research into the 'role of the local state', considering how we prevent homelessness in the context of localism, austerity and welfare reforms, will be published in June 2019
- The next Financial Inclusion Group seminar is on 3 September 2019 and will focus on problem debt. For more information, or to book a place, email financial.inclusion@newcastle.gov.uk

1: Maximise income and respond to the welfare reforms (including digital inclusion)

Table 1.1: Annualised benefit gains and clients advised by the Newcastle Advice Compact

	2017-18	Q1 (18-19)	Q2 (18-19)	Q3 (18-19)	Q4 (18-19)	2018-19
Benefit gains	£30,000,543	£7,670,863	£9,192,669	£7,055,427	£7,195,993	£31,171,014
Clients advised	19,069	5,158	5,421	5,073	5,911	21,670

Trends:

Advisers continue to experience more time consuming and complex cases due to the welfare reforms. Table 1.1 shows that partners reported a 2% increase in clients advised and a 16% increase in benefit gains compared to the previous quarter. On-year comparisons show a 4% increase in clients advised and a 13% increase in benefit gains, despite Warmzone's closure in Q2 2018-19. This demonstrates the value of, and continued need for, specialist advice for vulnerable residents.

What we are doing:

- As part of making financial inclusion everyone's business the [spectrum of advice for benefits](#) continues to help services better understand what level of benefit support services provide, whilst providing support for those organisations in the form of training, information and advice, for example:
 - 193 people completed the 'Introduction to Benefits' tiers 1 and 2 and the 'Universal Credit' e-learning modules in 2018-19; an 82% increase on the previous year
 - 115 people attended the free quarterly face to face training on 'Introduction to Benefits' and 'Preventing Benefit Sanctions' in 2018-19. The next sessions are on 20 June and 25 July 2019 respectively. For more information or to book a place email activeinclusion@newcastle.gov.uk
 - 3,196 people receive our bi-monthly Benefit Bulletins which provide the latest benefit news and targeted information and 'tips' to help navigate the benefits system and avoid problems
 - The Active Inclusion Service writes a quarterly article on welfare reforms for the national Institute of Money Advisers' Quarterly Account magazine, which is distributed to 1,930 money advisers
 - The Welfare Rights Service answered 451 consultancy advice calls from professionals in 2018-19
- The Newcastle Advice Compact undertook a take-up and communications campaign for residents affected by the 'mixed age' couples change on 15 May 2019. Further information on these changes can be found on our [information for professionals and volunteers webpage](#)
- During 2018-19 there were 27,494 unique visits to the welfare rights and money advice section of Newcastle City Council's website – www.newcastle.gov.uk/welfarerights. The most visited page describes [benefit advice services and benefit offices](#) and the second most visited describes [Universal Credit](#)
- Citizens Advice Newcastle participated in research on Universal Credit with the [Institute for Public Policy Research](#) (IPPR)
- Five Ward Committees are funding Welfare Rights drop-in sessions for residents. Between 1 April 2013 and 28 March 2019, ward projects secured £6,572,322 in annualised benefit gains. Every £1 invested by Ward Committees generated a financial return of £37.77. Details of ward drop-in sessions are listed in the [Where to Get Advice in Newcastle](#) booklet

- Support for Universal Credit claims in Newcastle is provided by the government funded Citizens Advice Newcastle 'Help to Claim' scheme and by council staff in the East End and the West End Community Hubs. Help with Universal Credit claimants with budgeting is provided by Your Homes Newcastle and the council's Money Matters service. Details are available at www.newcastle.gov.uk/universalcredit-moredetail
- In 2018-19 the Welfare Rights Service advised:
 - 460 residents with learning disabilities to claim benefits worth £1,460,552 per year
 - 2,986 residents with physical difficulties to claim benefits worth £6,227,126 per year
 - 1,353 residents with mental health problems to claim benefits worth £3,165,599 per year
 - 870 carers to claim benefits worth £1,998,058 per year
 - 1,313 families with a disabled child to claim benefits worth £4,088,292 per year
- From May 2018 we have seconded an Active Inclusion Officer to work with Jobcentre Plus to reduce the risk of homelessness. For more information contact James Williams by email james.williams@newcastle.gov.uk
- We are continuing to develop the Homelessness Prevention Trailblazer, which is extended to include Early Years help. The Homelessness Prevention Trailblazer is a programme to consolidate Active Inclusion Newcastle and strengthen our citywide approach to identifying residents' risks of homelessness related to the foundations for a stable life: somewhere to live, an income, financial inclusion and employment opportunities
- The Active Inclusion Service provides targeted benefit information for GP TeamNet, the web-based portal for health staff including GPs, with 870 views so far
- The Active Inclusion Service continues to work with Ways to Wellness and Primary Care Navigators to improve partnership working in relation to social prescribing

What next:

- The Welfare Rights Service are repeating the Tax Credit take-up sessions at the Bangladeshi Centre on 21 & 22 May, 16 & 17 July 2019. In 2017-18, the service secured £225,139 in annualised financial gains for over 50 people
- Citizens Advice Newcastle have been funded by the Meso UK Charity to provide a part-time Welfare Advisor for those affected by Mesothelioma and other asbestos-related cancers. The project covers the North East, starting July 2019
- The Welfare Rights Service are to commence a monthly advice session at the Marie Curie hospice (3 hours per month)
- Computershare have awarded Citizens Advice Newcastle £2,500 to provide debt advice to people using the West End Food Bank
- Given the impact of austerity measures and reductions in benefit support on household budgets, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation has developed a [definition of destitution](#), which the Council's Welfare Rights team is using. This will help us to better identify residents at risk of destitution and to understand why and what responses are available. Newcastle Advice Compact partners are considering monitoring using the same definition

Case study: Supporting vulnerable residents to maximise income

Context



Single female recently divorced and living alone



She has chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) and mental health issues



She attended a ward funded welfare rights drop-in service. Due to her mental health issues she rarely left her home, but because the sessions were so close to her home she felt confident to attend with support from family members



She had previously received Employment Support Allowance (ESA) contribution based (Support Group). Following a new Work Capability Assessment, she was placed in an ESA Work Related Activity Group (WRAG paid at a lower amount). This change also meant the loss of Enhanced Disability Premium when calculating other benefit entitlement

Work done and outcomes:

- Welfare Rights requested a Mandatory Reconsideration, highlighting the serious risk to health if she was found not to have limited capability for work related activity (Support Group criteria)
- Welfare Rights gathered medical evidence and a supporting letter from her GP stating there would be a significant risk to health if she was not in the Support Group. The letter also details the impact that being moved to the WRAG had had on her health
- The DWP accepted the submission and the evidence and she was therefore put back into the Support Group
- Welfare Rights' intervention resulted in £20.26 weekly increase in her income:

ESA Support Group	£112.32
Housing Benefit	£63.05
Council Tax Reduction	£7.91
Occupational Pension	£55.61
Total	£239.89 (Annual increase of £1,053.52)
- The resident is now back in the Support Group removing the risk of any sanctions connected to work-related conditionality

Digital inclusion

Table 1.2: Initiatives to promote digital inclusion

	2017-18	Q1 (18-19)	Q2 (18-19)	Q3 (18-19)	Q4 (18-19)	2018-19
Digital skills courses	87 sessions 503 attended	33 sessions 127 attended	26 sessions 123 attended	22 sessions 120 attended	17 sessions 86 attended	98 sessions 456 attended
People's Network take-up	30%	29%	29%	27%	28%	28%
One to one digital sessions	129	25	22	21	Pending	Pending
Hours volunteered	1,473	352	414	416	426	1,598

Trends:

Table 1.2 summarises activities to support residents to get online. Between Q3 and Q4 of 2018-19 uptake of activities decreased by 28% although the number of hours volunteered to support residents get online increased by 2%, possibly due to fewer sessions following holidays. On-year comparisons show an 8% increase in the number of hours volunteered in 2018-19, reflecting the increase in volunteer-delivered sessions. For more information about the help available to get online contact Lisa Dawson by email lisa.dawson@yhn.org.uk or phone 0191 277 1251.

What we are doing:

- Free Wi-Fi is available in 69 public buildings and city centre streets increasing opportunities for people to get online. For more information visit <http://www.godigitalnewcastle.co.uk/wifi>
- During Q4 2018-19 we held 7 Techy Tea Parties for customers with a tablet, iPhone or smartphone that they want to learn more about. Techy Tea Parties take place on the second and last Thursdays of the month at City Library. In Q4 57 residents attended. For more information, or to book a place, visit [Newcastle Libraries' event webpage](#)
- During Q4 2018-19 we held 17 sessions (8 courses) of the Learn My Way, Online Basics sessions. For more information, or to book a place, visit [Newcastle Libraries' event webpage](#)
- City Job Centre invited Lisa Dawson to talk to their Work Coaches about the digital support available for residents and how this is accessed. Following this Lisa now attends City Job Centre for 1 hour per week to meet with Work Coaches and residents to discuss the help available to get online
- Specialist Get Online Champion Training sessions for staff from local community and charity organisations continue to run monthly at the City Library. During Q4 2018-19 2 courses were delivered and 7 residents attended. For more information contact Lisa Dawson lisa.dawson@newcastle.gov.uk
- An additional Learn My Way, Online Basics course is being delivered on Tuesdays, increasing the number of courses delivered to three per week. For more information, or to book a place, visit [Newcastle Libraries' event webpage](#)

2: Support residents to manage their money, increase financial resilience, reduce harmful debt and prevent homelessness

Table 2.1: Debt and budgeting advice provision by Newcastle Advice Compact and its impact on Newcastle residents including homelessness prevention through debt advice

	2017-18	Q1 (18-19)	Q2 (18-19)	Q3 (18-19)	Q4 (18-19)	2018-19
Debts written off	£2,604,533*	£467,044*	£429,756	£389,172*	£703,516*	£1,989,488*
Clients advised	6,454*	1,311*	1,200*	1,146*	1,259*	4,916*
Homelessness prevention	1,785*	38**	32**	59*	64*	193*

* Figure does not include all partners ** Figure only includes Money Matters returns

Trends:

Table 2.1 shows that between Q3 and Q4 of 2018-19 the number of clients advised increased by 10%, which is typical after the winter holiday period. As not all partners have reported returns for all of 2018-19, we are unable to provide a full comparison with previous years.

Money Matters Debt Advisers continue to monitor sustainability of their clients' budgets. During Q4 2018-19, out of 146 households for whom budgets were completed:

- **73% had sustainable budgets**
- **12% were able to meet their living costs because of additional financial support**, such as Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) to help pay their rent and the Supporting Independence Scheme (SIS) to replace unaffordable goods bought on hire purchase
- **15% had unsustainable budgets** where they had insufficient income to meet their basic living costs, but there was no additional financial support available

What we are doing:

We continue to take a coordinated citywide approach to supporting Newcastle residents affected by money problems and debt. Examples include:

- Supporting households on Housing Benefit affected by the lower benefit cap – at 31 March 2019, Revenues and Benefits information showed that there were 244 households in Newcastle who were affected by the benefit cap:
 - YHN's Advice and Support Team continue to support their affected tenants
 - The [Homelessness Prevention Trailblazer](#) multidisciplinary team began approaching residents using a 'case finding' approach on 12 November 2017. The initial pilot ran until the end of March 2019. At that point the team had identified and approached 296 residents who were at risk of homelessness. The team currently identify residents through seven different routes: YHN tenants affected by the "bedroom tax" and benefit cap; single YHN tenants involved in the '[sustaining tenancies](#)' process; residents identified as having integrated needs by Energy Services and both private rented and YHN tenants identified as 'at risk' through the use of predictive analytics. In January 2019, the team also began using predictive analytics to identify earlier opportunities in the 'sustaining tenancies' process, households with three or more children, living in private tenancies, and who may soon transition onto UC. The team helped to write off **£141,026.18** of debts (up to £20,454.13 for a single household) and gain **£288,960.81** (up to £27,002.14 for a single household) in additional benefit entitlement as part of the team's holistic approach to seeking sustainable solutions for households. The final summative report that draws together learning from the team's work over their initial pilot period will be available in June 2019. The team have secured funding to continue their work until September 2020 through the Life Chances Fund. Email activeinclusion@newcastle.gov.uk to request a copy

- The Active Inclusion Service co-ordinates support for households in private and social rented tenancies and prioritises according to the risk of homelessness: 'high risk' households include families that are losing £60 per week or more in Housing Benefit and/or households that are vulnerable due to their prior or current involvement with prevention services. 'High risk' households are referred to Money Matters for support. Between 1 June 2016 and 31 March 2019, Money Matters offered advice and support to 233 affected households. Information on some of the outcomes and outputs of this support and on the barriers that the families need to overcome to improve their finances and achieve financial stability is highlighted below:
 - 39 households are no longer affected by the benefit cap
 - 80 households received debt advice and 47 received budgeting advice; 49 were awarded DHPs which amounted to £75,571 in extra income; 36 were prevented from becoming homeless and 18 were referred to Newcastle Futures for employment support
 - 196 barriers to a stable life were recorded against 61 benefit cap households, including 35 households in housing that is no longer affordable, 26 without access to childcare, 15 with no confidence of securing employment and 19 with an addiction which reduces their ability to pay priority bills
- Supporting residents who are claiming UC – YHN and Money Matters provide Personal Budgeting Support (PBS) to residents who need help managing their money as a result of claiming UC. 291 referrals were made during Q4 2018-19, a decrease of 14% on the previous quarter. Year on year, the number of referrals for Personal Budgeting support increased by 65%, from 657 in 2017-18 to 1,081 in 2018-19
- Supporting residents who are applying for a DHP to help them pay their rent – in Q4 Revenues and Benefits referred 5 residents to Money Matters for budgeting support following a DHP application
- We provide training to partners as part of our [spectrum of advice for money management \(budgeting and debt\)](#). As part of this approach:
 - The 'Debt Awareness' e-learning module was completed by 22 people in Q4 and provides basic debt information and details of organisations residents can be signposted to for advice
 - Quarterly face to face 'Introduction to Budgeting' training was completed by 14 people in Q4. Details of the Active Inclusion Newcastle training programme is available online at <https://www.newcastle.gov.uk/financialinclusionforprofessionals>
 - 444 subscribers received our quarterly debt bulletins, providing the latest debt news and targeted information. To view and sign up for debt bulletins visit <https://www.newcastle.gov.uk/financialinclusionforprofessionals> or email activeinclusion@newcastle.gov.uk
- Money Matters supported 13 vulnerable residents to obtain a Debt Relief Order (DRO) in 2018-19 through its discretionary DRO fund

What next:

- Newcastle is one of the three local authorities chosen to pilot a new approach to problem debt – the Civil Service initiative "Re-imagine Debt" – which involves government departments identifying vulnerable people early and providing joined-up support to people who struggle with debt. 20 households have now been selected and are receiving support from Money Matters. Feedback was provided to the national Reimagining Debt Steering Group on 11 March 2019 and the pilot is going to be progressed from within the Cabinet Office and will start to be extended to other local authority areas

- In March 2017 Money Advice Service (MAS) released the [Standard Financial Statement \(SFS\)](#), a single format for financial statements, allowing debt advisors and creditors to work together to achieve the best outcomes for people struggling with their finances. We are consulting with MAS about Newcastle City Council's Corporate Debt Strategy to help us create more consistency between Newcastle City Council's collection departments and debt advisers, and a smoother transition through the debt collection process for residents who owe money to Newcastle City Council
- As part of our work to support residents with debts and to roll out the SFS, we are working with Advice Compact partners to develop a consistent approach to budgeting support and debt advice for residents whose income is insufficient to meet their basic needs, and/or to afford to make debt repayments. This was the topic of the Financial Inclusion Group Seminar in October 2018. Following on from this, we are working with staff to review the Council's approach to corporate debt to move from collection towards connection on the context of resident's reduced incomes and increased debts
- Money Matters advisers were interviewed as part of research by Heriot Watt University on the 'Role of the local state' to consider how we prevent homelessness in the context of localism, austerity & welfare reforms. The final report will be published May 2019
- Money Matters fed into Newcastle City Council's response to the ongoing Work and Pensions Committee inquiry in the Welfare Safety net. The inquiry considered "how effectively the UK's welfare system works to protect against hardship and chronic deprivation" and Money Matters provided information on 'debt solutions available', foodbank vouchers issued and budget sustainability, as well as identifying 3 Universal Credit Personal Budgeting Support cases who were in financial hardship because of the way that Universal Credit is administered

Case study: preventing homelessness

Context



Single widowed female referred to Money Matters by a Homelessness Prevention Officer at the Housing Advice Centre due to having received a warrant of eviction for rent arrears of £2,534, including court costs. She lives alone in private rented accommodation and is retired. She suffers from arthritis in both hips.



She had lived in her property for four years and been struggling with her finances since her husband died. She was in receipt of two small occupational pensions and a widows' pension. She was one year into an Individual Voluntary Arrangement (IVA) in respect of her other debts when she presented to the Housing Advice Centre.

Work done and outcomes:

- Money Matters carried out a benefit check for the client and identified entitlement to Housing Benefit and Attendance Allowance. Money Matters referred her to a Welfare Rights Officer (WRO) working in the Housing Advice Centre; the WRO completed an application for Attendance Allowance and contacted Housing Benefit on the client's behalf
- Money Matters applied for Discretionary Housing Payment for help to clear some of the rent arrears and liaised with Revenues and Benefits to have the matter dealt with as a priority. An award of **£2,148** was made before the client attended court, leaving her with only the court costs element to repay
- Money Matters applied to the Northern Ladies Annuity Society for financial assistance
- Money Matters completed an N244 Application to Suspend the Warrant and liaised with the Duty Solicitor. At court, the client's landlord agreed to the suspension
- An arrangement was put in place so that the client would repay the court costs and as her rent arrears had been cleared, she was then able to join Tyne and Wear Homes to look for cheaper accommodation

3: Help residents to train, gain and remain in employment

Table 3.1: Number of people supported into employment, self-employment, volunteering or apprenticeships

	2017-18	Q1 (18-19)	Q2 (18-19)	Q3 (18-19)	Q4 (18-19)	2018-19
People supported into employment, training volunteering or apprenticeships	996	298	113	78*	141*	630*

*figure does not include all partners and may change

Trends:

Table 3.1 shows that between Q3 and Q4 of 2018-19 the number of residents supported into employment increased by 9%. However, figures have fluctuated throughout the year as not all partners have consistently reported their figures via the Newcastle Employment Support Compact. This makes comparison with previous periods difficult.

Employment advisors from the Supported Employment Service, Newcastle Futures, YHN and Crisis Skylight Newcastle continue to work with residents experiencing significant barriers to employment which must be overcome before work can be considered. Typically, barriers relate to confidence, debt, concerns about being “worse off” and fears about rent affordability.

What we are doing:

- The Skills Hub and City Library offer a variety of free workshops and events to help people into work. Details of upcoming events are available [here](#)
- YHN held their annual Jobs and training Fair at St. James Park. Over 350 tenants attended the event meeting with potential employers and training providers. For more information contact the Employment Team by email employabilityteam@yhn.org.uk
- In February 2019, a third Learning Hive was launched within the Blakelaw Centre providing employment support to residents. A qualified tutor can offer individual support with job searches, CV writing and interview preparation. Tutors also deliver scheduled classes and qualifications in maths and English. Further information is available at www.learninghive.uk
- YHN are a delivery partner for the European Social Fund (ESF) and National Lottery Funded ‘Wise Steps’ programme, which supports people with multiple barriers to employment find work. The team have developed a delivery programme which involves supporting tenants who have identified IT and digital skills as a barrier to employment
- 5 tenants who were employed by YHN prior to Q4 of 2018-19 all progressed into permanent employment in Q4. The tenants were employed through a combination of our Your Homes Your Jobs and Apprenticeship programmes.
- The Supported Employment Service opened a second FoodWorks café at Fenham Library in December 2018. FoodWorks cafes and coffee carts provide ethical and sustainable employment for 7 people who have experienced significant barriers to employment. Further information about FoodWorks is available at www.wemakethingsbetter.co.uk

What next:

- We will be promoting cooperative growth – supporting the 40,000 households affected by welfare reforms to participate in the city’s economic development; sharing solutions and developing a coordinated, targeted response for residents who need additional support to gain and sustain employment

4: Promote the expansion of affordable credit options as an alternative to expensive high interest credit, such as payday loans or loan sharks

Table 4.1: Moneywise Credit Union membership and loans granted

	2017-18	Q1 (18-19)	Q2 (18-19)	Q3 (18-19)	Q4 (18-19)	2018-19
No. of members	11,352	11,531	11,219	11,385	9,782	9,782
Loans granted	2,308	560	530	838	454	2,422
Loan value	£2,266,706	£503,610	£553,756	£737,632	£477,213	£2,272,211

Table 4.2: Five Lamps loans granted and loan value (Newcastle residents)

	2016-17	Q1 (18-19)	Q2 (18-19)	Q3 (18-19)	Q4 (18-19)	2018-19
Loans granted	457	84	89	169	68	410
Loan value	£315,353	£65,810	£65,709	£127,260	£45,400	£304,179

Trends:

Table 4.1 shows that between Q3 and Q4 of 2018-19 Moneywise Credit Union's membership decreased by 14% due to the closure of inactive accounts. In the same period the number of loans granted by Moneywise Credit Union and Five Lamps decreased by 46% and 60% respectively. This reflects a seasonal trend and figures are comparable to the same period in 2017-18.

What we are doing:

- The Illegal Money Lending Team have developed a series of short cartoons to warn children and young people about the dangers of loan sharks. The cartoons are available online at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=37wgTGyZ7J0>
- The Illegal Money Lending Team's Proceeds of Crime Fund is accepting funding applications for projects that help to raise awareness of the dangers of loan sharks. For more information visit www.stoploansharks.co.uk
- Moneywise Credit Union is working with the Illegal Money Lending Team, Blakelaw Community Centre and the Raising Participation Team to develop and deliver a project for young adults. 10 people have signed up and agreed to save money for 12 weeks, on completion they will receive a £25 bonus paid into their savings account. A condition of receiving the bonus is that no withdrawals can be made until July 2019
- Five Lamps has secured £5m investment to help vulnerable households break out of the cycle of high-cost debt. Further information is available [here](#)
- Five Lamps is working in partnership with ASDA to promote affordable credit options to customers. Further information is available at www.money.asda.com/personal-loans/
- Moneywise Credit Union have introduced several new products for members to improve access to affordable credit. New products include a Christmas Savings account, a revolving credit account, and a Just Borrow loan (similar to a payday loan). Further information is available at www.moneywise.org.uk

5: Reduce fuel poverty, increase financial resilience and promote access to bank accounts

Table 5.1: Energy Services new referrals, cases closed and financial outputs

	2017-18	Q1 (18-19)	Q2 (18-19)	Q3 (18-19)	Q4 (18-19)	2018-19
New YHN referrals	334	89	79	95	88	351
New non YHN enquiries	67	26	26	58	60	170
Energy debts written off	£104,708	£8,654	£15,790	£25,849	£30,666	£111,625
Total cases closed	259	91	48	120	84	343
Average financial gains	£404.28	£95.10	£328.96	£215.40	£365.07	£325.44

Table 5.2: Citizens Advice Newcastle's (CAN) Northern Powergrid Fuel Debt Project's new clients seen and fuel debt issues dealt with

	2017-18	Q1 (18-19)	Q2 (18-19)	Q3 (18-19)	Q4 (18-19)	2018-19
New clients	566	216	225	315	325	1,081
Issues addressed	978	370	387	417	541	1,174

Trends:

Newcastle City Council's Energy Services provide specialist energy saving and fuel debt advice to Newcastle residents and fuel debt casework. Table 5.1 shows that between Q3 and Q4 of 2018-19 referrals decreased by 3%. The main reasons for referral continue to relate to fuel debt, high energy bills and general energy advice.

CAN's Northern Powergrid Fuel Debt Project started in October 2014. It provides a daily drop-in face-to-face specialist advice for residents experiencing problems with energy bills and fuel debt, including advice on reducing energy costs by switching tariffs, payment methods or suppliers, and saving money through energy efficiency, or help with current supply problems, including debts and disputed bills. Table 5.2 above shows that between Q3 and Q4 of 2018-19, the number of new clients seen increased by 3%, but issues addressed increased by 30%. In Q4 the project also helped residents to deal with £85,788.91 of fuel related issues, including fuel debt, reimbursements, hardship payments and tariff checks.

What we are doing

- Newcastle City Council's Crisis Support Scheme provided 268 fuel top-up vouchers at a value of £11,179 during Q4 of 2018-19 to residents experiencing crisis or disaster
- CAN have a hardship fund to support vulnerable clients (based on Ofgem's definition of vulnerability) experiencing hardship, for example benefit delays, with a one-off short-term emergency payment via the Northern Powergrid Fuel Debt Project. For more information contact the team by e-mail powergrid@newcastlecab.org.uk or phone 0370 1451450
- Newcastle City Council is running an energy price comparison and switching scheme. For more information visit www.newcastle.gov.uk/energyswitch
- Newcastle City Council have been awarded £400,000 from National Grid to install gas central heating systems for fuel poor households without central heating. For more information contact Energy Services on 0191 2783427

- Newcastle City Council have secured funding from National Grid to provide support to residents who are home owners or are living in private rented accommodation. For more information contact Energy Services on 0191 2783427

What next:

- Energy Services have reviewed best practice from the other cities which have decided to have a greater role in the supply of energy to their communities. An energy company options appraisal is being carried out with other North East local authorities and North East Procurement Organisation (NEPO)

6. Tackle food poverty

Table 6.1: Number of food parcels issued by the Crisis Support Scheme to residents experiencing crisis or disaster

	2017-18	Q1 18-19	Q2 18-19	Q3 18-19	Q4 18 – 19	2018-19
Number of parcels issued		139	149	182	236	706

Tackling food poverty was added to our aims following January 2019's Financial Inclusion Group seminar. As this is a relatively new area, we will be working with partners to develop measures to understand food insecurity levels, the reasons why people use foodbanks and opportunities to prevent crisis at the earliest opportunity.

Table 6.1 shows the number of food parcels issued by the Crisis Support Scheme to residents experiencing crisis or disaster. Between Q3 2018-19 and Q4 2018-19, the number of parcels issued increased by 30%.

What we are doing:

- We have worked with Food Nation to establish the Food Poverty Network Group in response to the Newcastle Good Food Plan, and to improve coordination and awareness of support for people experiencing food insecurity. For more information contact Clare Fish by email clare.fish@newcastle.gov.uk
- Newcastle City Council and Street Games have secured funding from the Department for Education to support disadvantaged children during summer school holidays by providing meals and activities. Projects will be based in east, west and central parts of Newcastle and will be open access to reduce stigma. For more information contact Duncan O'Farrell by email duncan.ofarrell@newcastle.gov.uk
- Food Power's annual conference is taking place on 12 June 2019 and provides an opportunity to share learning and experiences in tackling food poverty. For more information contact Simon Shaw by email simon@sustainweb.org
- We have mapped the emergency food, discounted food and free hot food provision available across the city. Information will be available via the [Information Now](#) website by August 2019
- Food Power Newcastle have set up a [Facebook page](#) detailing emergency food, free food or discounted food in Byker
- Food Newcastle have applied to the Sustainable Food Cities for the bronze award. Awards recognise work to tackle key food issues
- Cardiff University is researching Food Power and how it works with organisations. Food Power aims to strengthen local communities' ability to reduce food poverty through locally developed solutions. Research findings will be reported to the Big Lottery Fund by Autumn 2019

What next:

- We are developing a financial inclusion pilot for Benfield School to help students and staff have a better understanding of issues and the support available
- We will be working with Newcastle West End Foodbank to provide support to residents experiencing food insecurity
- The Food Poverty Network Group is considering opportunities to measure food insecurity levels in Newcastle. Work will also seek to understand the reasons why people use foodbanks and identify earlier opportunities for intervention. For more information contact Clare Fish by email

Active Inclusion Newcastle

The Financial Inclusion Group is part of the Active Inclusion Newcastle partnership approach that responds to the growth in demand for information, advice and support to promote social and financial inclusion and to prevent the risk of homelessness with reduced resources. The Active Inclusion Newcastle partnership coordinates responses to the welfare reforms, austerity and destitution by creating the conditions for stability:

- **An income**
- **Somewhere to live**
- **Financial inclusion – life without excessive debt**
- **Training and employment opportunities**

The Active Inclusion Newcastle partnership provides and supports partners to deliver the following:

Primary prevention activities – to support making the prevention of homelessness and destitution ‘everyone’s business’:

- Information for professionals, volunteers and the public – financial inclusion examples are available online at www.newcastle.gov.uk/financialinclusionforprofessionals
- Consultancy advice for professionals and volunteers – contact details are available online at www.newcastle.gov.uk/financialinclusionforprofessionals
- Briefing sessions for professionals and volunteers – to request a briefing, email activeinclusion@newcastle.gov.uk
- Spectrums of advice – details are available online at www.newcastle.gov.uk/financialinclusionforprofessionals
- Training for professionals and volunteers – details of e-learning modules and face to face training sessions are available online at www.newcastle.gov.uk/financialinclusionforprofessionals
- Protocols and policies – details are available online at www.newcastle.gov.uk/homelessnesspreventionforprofessionals
- Partnerships and governance – details are available online at www.newcastle.gov.uk/financialinclusionforprofessionals
- Copies of previous quarterly reviews are available online at www.newcastle.gov.uk/benefits-and-council-tax/welfare-rights-and-money-advice/information-professionals-and-volunteers/financial-inclusion-group

Secondary prevention activities – specialist advice and accommodation services that community based primary services can turn to when they need help

Crisis activities – services that support people facing destitution when community and preventative support fails to prevent crisis

Next steps and how to get involved

The issues raised in this briefing were discussed at the Newcastle Advice Compact meeting on 15 May 2019. Feedback has been incorporated into this document which will be presented to councillors and the Financial Inclusion Group at our next seminar on 3 September 2019.

For more information on financial inclusion:

visit www.newcastle.gov.uk/financialinclusionforprofessionals or contact Clare Fish by phone 0191 277 7529, or e-mail clare.fish@newcastle.gov.uk